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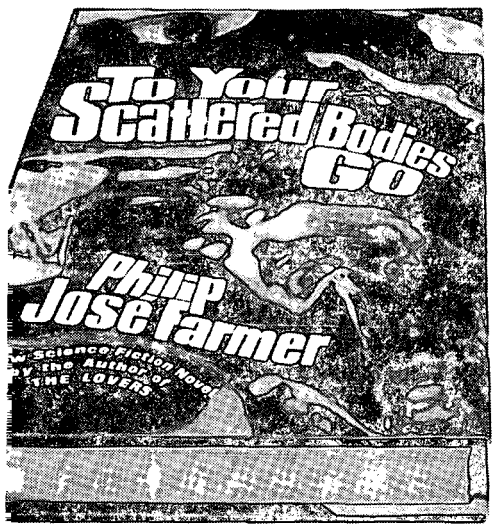

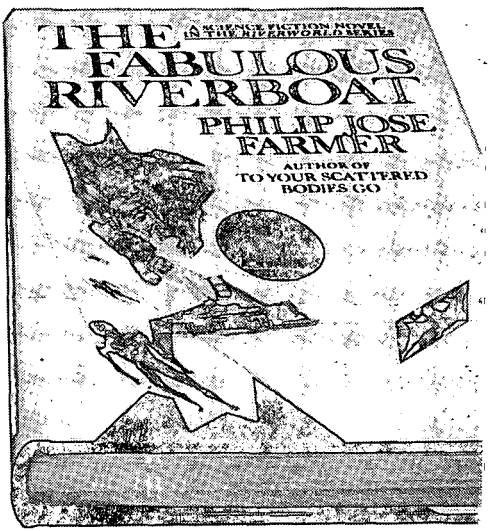
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ALL STORIES NEW
May-June 1973
Vo. 33, No. 6

Galaxy
SCIENCE FICTION

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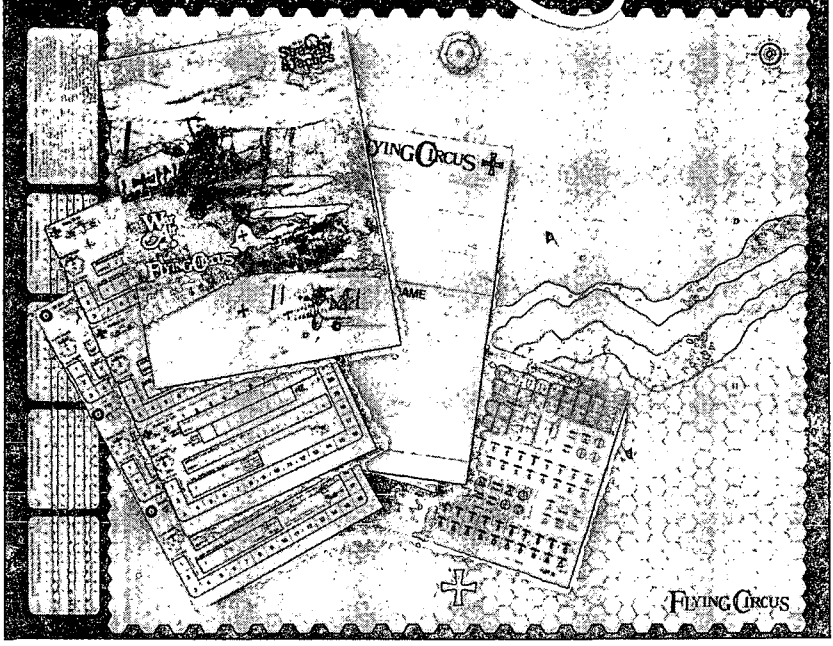
Strategy & Tactics



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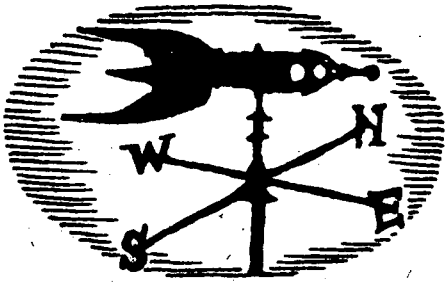

DIRECTIONS

Directions:

In his letter in the January Directions Brent Higginbotham says, "Adventure, excitement, the old 'sense of wonder' need no rationalization. Even pornography need not be burdened with redeeming social value if it succeeds in what it sets out to do—titillate."

Friends, comparing pornography to science fiction is like comparing a ring-toss to a moon shot. The craft involved in arousing a reader sexually has nothing to do with the art of writing worthwhile fiction. Neither does writing a good fight scene. Yet there is something to the comparison, although I doubt it is what Mr. Higginbotham had in mind: Just as the necessity for redeeming social value has hampered pornography for several years now, the requirement that science fiction be jam-crammed with action, thrills, Great Peril and good ole "sense of wonder" has kept it in the cheapjack class of literature in which it at least in part belongs. How many of the Great Books which command universal respect are fast-action thrillers? Middlemarch? Little Dorrit? Catcher in the Rye? Ulysses?

The fact of the matter is that writing to give the reader his thrills is every bit as low as writing to give him titillation, and face it—only semiliterates read science fiction purely for the action. Yet "action" seems to be a science fiction tradition. Traditionalism in all forms is detestable, however. (A fine semantic point: traditions, of course, are not in themselves detestable at all, but those who insist that traditions are all that matter are.*) If traditions stuck in music (for example) as many wish they would, composers today would still be sitting around rehashing Bach & Co.*

The same holds true for the scientific aspects of sf. A. J. Budrys, in reviewing Chip Delany's Nova *a few years back, said something to the effect of: "As far as I can see, the most that science fiction can do is wring your heart while telling you how it works." Talk about selling something short! That's like saying* Moby Dick *is a story about a whale. How many real writers give a good goddam about blowing another hole in Euclidian geometry, or about taking time out from the hero's psychological problems to show what happens to a micelle in colloidal dispersion? If, as a writer, you don't have anything better to worry about you're in the wrong business.*

Which brings us simultaneously to "relevance" and back to Mr. Higginbotham's letter. Once again he is right in a horribly mistaken way. Any sort of relevance is a passing thing. And, though it may pain many to hear it, Stand on Zanzibar, The Byworlder, The Sheep Look Up, Make Room!

(Cont. on page 174)

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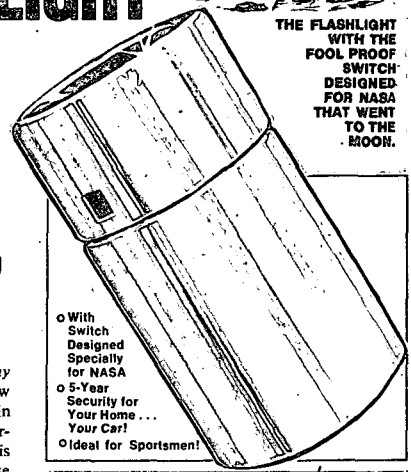

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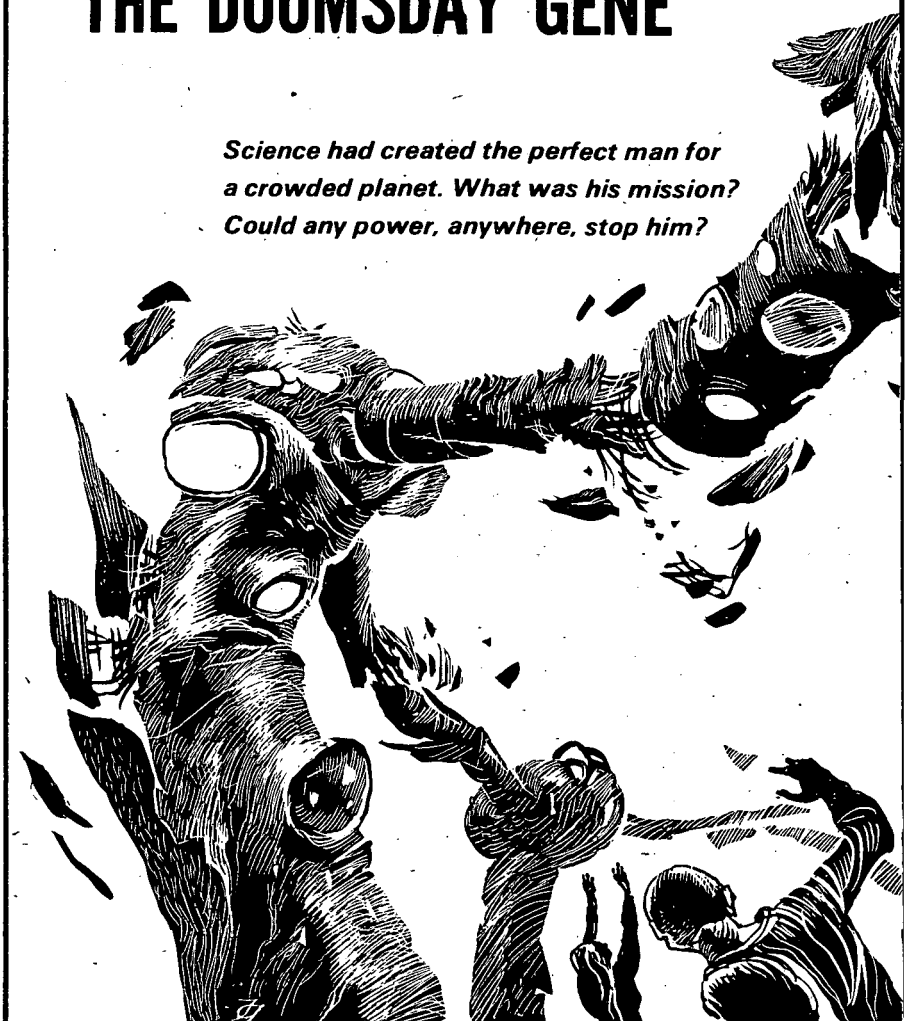
JOHN BOYD

THE DOOMSDAY GENE

Science had created the perfect man for a crowded planet. What was his mission? Could any power, anywhere, stop him?



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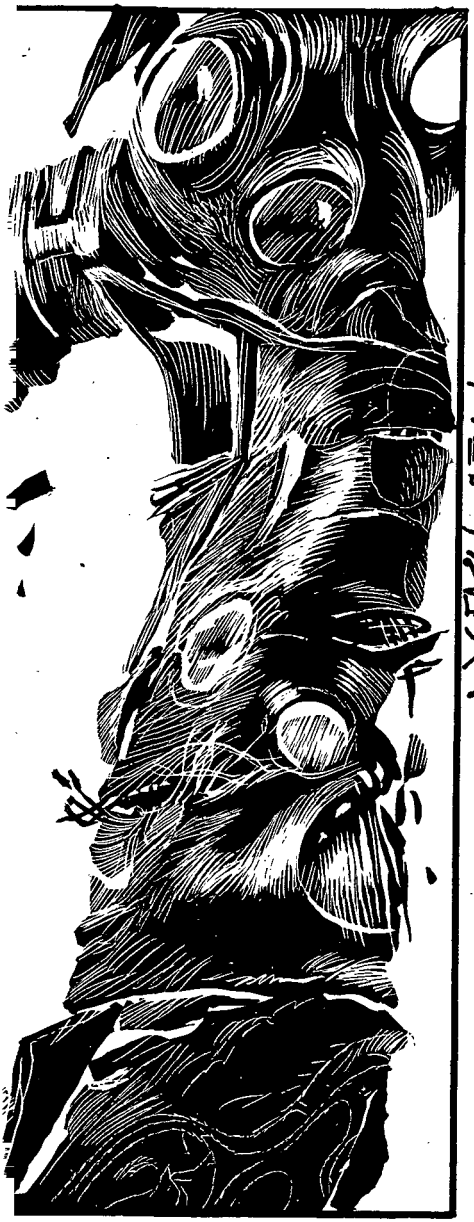
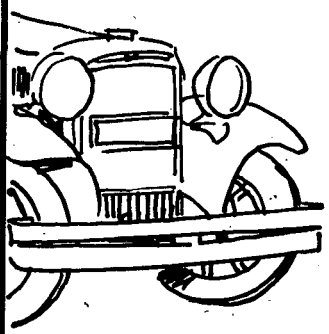


PART ONE



ON A bright morning in January Dr. John Heywood descended to his office in the Department of Experimental Genetics on the twentieth floor of the California Institute of Technology's tower, bade his secretary a good morning and entered his private suite. As he started to remove his coat he glanced at the mail laid out on his desk and noticed an envelope with the return address: *U.S. State Department, Bureau E.* Heywood sat down without removing his coat. He reached for a letter opener hilted

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with an ivory replica of Michelangelo's Statue of David.

Two holographic computer cards fell from the opened envelope. Both were buff colored but one was edged with a black border. Inside was also a letter, amateurishly typed and written in an informal, familiar style at odds with the sudden intensity of the man who read it.

Johnny boy:

Leave it to Cal Tech to corral all the oddball experiments!

A corkscrew helix is coming your way from Baghdad. Amal Eugene Severn—The Ideal Man for a Crowded Planet—is transferring to the Cal Tech Seismology Department to study the San Andreas Fault.

To refresh your memory—if a memory like yours ever needs refreshing—he's the fourth of five prototypes in Ambulatory Eugenic Experiment Seven, so you should have a line on three of his creche mates before his own Thanatos Syndrome is triggered, which should be around May 1 since he's programed to make the big contribution by the end of April.

His white and black genetic cards are herewith.

I hear the boys in the back room at Kiev have a betting pool on the self-termination date of their specimen, a gonad grabber by the name of Ailya Eugenia Semenovna. Now that's what I call scientific Russian roulette.

Remember, Amal is our own baby, literally and figuratively, so let's keep him under our observation. The earthquake boys might suspect something when Amal goes into action, but before any suspicions congeal the human Mayfly will have flown, taking all evidence of the Thanatos Syndrome Factor with him.

Speaking of the T. S. Factor, a whimsical antiquarian on my staff tells me that "T. S.," in World War II slang, stood for an expression which politely translates as "tough sugar" or "that's all, brother."

You lucky stiff,
Eddie

Dr. Heywood took the letter, folded it and dropped it into a container attached to the side of his desk. The paper fell to the bottom of the container and evaporated. Then he fingered the panel board on a computer input box and stared for a moment at the screen. Lifting his phone, he dialed a number and said, "Doctor, you have a Nils Larsen in your class. Let me talk to him."

Heywood's voice was flat and matter-of-fact as he spoke to the professor over the telephone. He waited a moment and when he

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spoke again his tone was vibrant and warm.

"Good morning, Nils. This is Doctor Heywood. How would you like to brush up on your Arabic and move your living quarters to the sixty-plus floor level? Good! Call at my apartment at seven tonight. I have a proposal I'd like to explain to you. And by the way, Nils, keep this confidential. I'll see you at seven."

Heywood hung up the phone and called in his secretary, to whom he gave the white card. "File this under LOS ANGELES AREA — TRANSIENT."

After the secretary left Heywood removed his coat and left his office, taking the black-margined card with him into a rear area of the wedge-shaped administration department, which occupied a full eighth of the tower's circle. He stopped at a tungsten steel safe and turned a combination lock, thinking of the betting pool set up by his Russian compatriots in Kiev. The Russians were free to bandy top-secret information among themselves—their Department of Human Engineering was a branch of the Soviet State Police. In the U.S. all academic departments of experimental genetics were answerable to the Eugenics Bureau of the State Department and were, in theory, subject to political jurisdiction.

Envying the academic freedom of his Russian colleagues, Heywood placed the unedited genetic index of Amal Severn into the black files and closed the safe. At Cal Tech only those with a need to know would be informed of the arrival on campus of one of the first five human beings programed from the fetal stage to accomplish much and to die young from a genetically induced self-destruct mechanism.

NUANCES of form and color in the girl at the window matched those of the city spread below her in the February twilight. She, too, seemed fashioned of metal and minerals, an artifact of marble, spun gold and jade. Lissomé, poised, square-shouldered, her body projected a regality not unlike the stateliness of the towers she looked out on and, like the beauty of the city, the beauty of the girl hid flaws. Behind Lyn Oberlin's composed features and cool green eyes her mind stirred to a premonition as bizarre as it was emphatic.

From girlhood her mind had been shadowed with precognitions, as if some inner eye glimpsed beforehand the outriding shapes of the future. At times the shapes seemed very close, observing rather than being observed. At such times her preternatural focus on the forms of the future became vaguely unsettling, as the sound of one's heartbeat at night is a comfortless reminder of mortality. This evening her sense of something waiting was

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so strong she found herself leaning toward the city.

For over a hundred years the city had been called the city of the future. Shimmering above an arboreal plain between snow-capped mountains and the sea, its varicolored towers resembled titanic minarets. Atop a central hill stood eight, all of yellow plastisteel and closely grouped in a circle linked at the fifty-floor level by an outward curving pedestrian tube. Topped by the knobs of mosque-domed restaurants, the central towers were designed to resemble a crown of gold, for in Spanish the city had been named "the city of Our Lady the Queen of the Angels," and the crown symbolized the diadem of *La Reina de Los Angeles.*

Even apart from the Moslem influence on architecture symbolizing the city's Christian origin, some critics considered the Los Angeles civic center overly flamboyant, but the major flaws of the city were invisible. Beneath its basin and through surrounding hills ran earthquake faults: the Sylmar Fault, the Inglewood-Newport Fault, the Hollywood Fault. Slanting north and east of the city lay the great San Andreas Fault which in eons past had split a massive peninsula from the mainland, created an ocean gulf and, in an earlier century, destroyed the city of San Francisco. Here, too, the earth often trembled, but Los Angeles shimmered unmarred in the sunlight and glittered in the darkness.

Turning from the window and going into her bedroom, Lyn Oberlin moved with a grace which inspired the average male liberal arts student to compare her with Diana, the Huntress—to the detriment of any romantic plans he might entertain. In the first place, Lyn detested cliches; secondly, once she had correlated a specific thought to a facial expression she could read a boy's mind without a too intent study of his features. For a "mindreader"—her precognition sometimes seemed to take this form, but she always put the term in quotes—flirting was as fascinating as playing poker with all the cards face up.

For that reason her premonition was all the more bizarre. No doubt millions of young women, dressing for a ball, had thought with clairvoyant certainty, *Tonight I'll meet the man I'll love and the man I'll marry.* Of those millions, she could safely assume, none had a sense of romance as jaded as her own. Aristotle had said that to understand all was to forgive all, but the Greek had never been a coed in the Greater Los Angeles University Complex. Here, to understand all that went on in the mind of a student was to be bored, revolted, or terrified.

Opening her jewel box, she stood for a moment in wonderment over her premonition. She was qualified

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by the Bureau of Eugenics to have two children, tax free, but marriage had never entered her plans. What husband could long tolerate a wife who could read his mind?

At U.S.C., the only suitor Lyn had even idly considered was Red Benton, a graduate law student who shared her interest in governmental procedures. Red's thoughts were so aseptic, legalistic and complex he was rarely offensive, but she would not meet the U.S.C. student at the Cal Tech ball.

She chose her grandmother's locket watch from the jewel case. It balanced the V-neckline of the twentieth century miniskirt she wore as a costume. The pendant watch carried out the old-fashioned theme of the dress, which was daring for the neo-Victorianism of the younger generation but showed her legs to advantage.

She snapped the locket behind her neck, wondering if her second invitation to the Cal Tech Scientists and Models Ball meant that the boys in the Daedalus Society planned to ask her to model for one of their life-sized, computer-activated gynodrones. If so, she would refuse the honor. She preferred being thought of as prudish to the knowledge that a lifelike replica of herself would be cavorting through the halls of the men's dormitories—on a rental basis—during the Sadie Hawkins Hour.

Still drawn to the mystery of the evening, she turned from the room.

Ballantine Books

The long hiatus—as we, with enormous well-bred control, are calling it—is over. Random House now owns Ballantine Books—joy abounds. This department is back being over-worked as usual, and loving it. And may I, speaking personally, say thank you to all the many, many gentle persons who wrote, called and otherwise conveyed their love and good wishes while we were all cliff-hanging. The next episode in our soap-opera looks good. An s.f. editor must, in logic, be far-sighted enough to buy against futures. But organizing the list for presentation at the Spring Sale Conference, we were rather astounded to find how well balanced we had, in fact, been.

●●●

Two anthologies: **THE ALIEN CONDITION,** *Ed. Stephen Goldin—all original stories; and* **THE BEST S.F. OF THE YEAR,** *Ed. Terry Carr—containing, not unnaturally, the best already published material.*

Two New Writers: Robert Wells, with **RIGHT-HANDED WILDERNESS;** *and Robert E. Toomey, Jr., with* **A WORLD OF TROUBLE.**

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***Two reprints: R. A. Lafferty's* ARRIVE AT EASTERWINE; *and Edgar Pangborn's* DAVY.**

***And finally: Two* STAR TREK *books by that busy fellow, David Gerrold—* THE TROUBLE WITH TRIBBLES *and* THE WORLD OF STAR TREK.**

●●●

That's balance by God. Some are already out of course. April and May will see the following:

THE CLOUD WALKER—*fun and games in a future culture fanatically punitive to technology.*

THE ALIEN CONDITION—*twelve originals on the subject of the title—a showcase for new writers.*

A WORLD OF TROUBLE—*Robert E. Toomey, Jr. Our favorite character is Pacesetter, a 12-legged behemoth, heavily fanged and clawed, who is the local transportation . . .*

DAVY—*Edgar Pangborn, who needs no introduction whatsoever.*

●●●

And we'll cover the Adult Fantasy next time round.

Blessings on you all. ***BB***

Usually unschooled in mythology, science students were less apt to compare her to Diana and give her an immediate code to deciper their thoughts. For a while, at least she could indulge the illusion that she was a normal girl.

BUOYANT, she emerged from her apartment into the circular corridor of the tower and pushed the elevator button for the parking basement. Twenty minutes later her enthusiasm was still with her when she parked her Dunemaster in the basement of the Cal Tech Tower and took the express elevator to the topmost floor and the students' pleasure dome.

The off-stage room where the guests awaited to be announced hummed with the voices of the feminine elite of the Los Angeles University complex, mostly describing their reactions to receiving the invitations. Only two girls were familiar to Lyn. One was a male-centered redhead from U.S.C., a dramatics major named Gloria Jaffee whom Lyn did not particularly like but with whom she sympathized. Gloria was suffering a severe but immaculately concealed attack of stage fright.

To calm her, Lyn engaged Gloria in conversation, telling her what to expect. "Be alert for surprises. Last year's theme was the county fair. After a holographic square dance on the stage, the girl dancers faded but the boy dancers ran among the

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audience, kissing the girls. One girl fainted when a solid hologram kissed her. Of course, real boys had been dancing with the shadows."

The other familiar face was reassuring to Lyn. Last year the girl had been attired in the same costume she wore tonight, that of a Spanish gypsy with a mantilla on her hair. Lyn remembered her name, Lola Oachoa, because it preceded Oberlin in the alphabetic order of introductions. A year had worked wonders with the girl's torso. She was a transfer student from Madrid, Lyn remembered.

The Spanish girl was introduced over the public address system immediately ahead of Lyn. She glided onto the stage with the grace and arrogance of a tango dancer. The ripple of urbane applause that greeted each guest rose to thunder as Lola Oachoa descended from the stage to choose her date for the night.

Feeling absurdly provincial, Lyn answered her own call to the stage with a defiantly American stride. The decibel level of applause was considerably moderated until some boy broke the house rules with a wolf whistle. The tonic of the sound threw Lyn back to her normal walk and the applause rose to a higher peak. If she could have found the boy who whistled, she would have chosen him out of sheer patriotism.

Descending into the arena, she walked among the tables to look over the offerings. Each table held a blond and a brunette for her to make her final choice between, but she needed a man to match her height and she preferred one with a guarded expression. Contact lenses were out in force tonight, she observed—the horn-rimmed status symbols of Cal Tech students were absent and the eyes above the bright table lamps glittered. Any ordinary girl could have read these boys' minds by studying their neck muscles.

Lyn paused.

A BOY at a table was looking at her with a bemused expression that suggested challenging thought patterns. He was tall enough for her—blond and broad-shouldered. A dueling scar could not have added to his aura of virility. Beside him sat a slender, dark-haired student with olive skin and incongruously gray eyes. He seemed as tall as the Teutonic knight, but his features were too sharp to be handsome and he was slender.

"I choose this table," she said to them. "I'm Lyn Oberlin, a graduate student at U.S.C. In the morning I'm secretary to Doctor Kley. In the afternoons I'm a student and socio-psychological counselor at the clinic."

She spoke mostly to the dark-haired youth to add to the suspense. Her final choice would not be made until a bell rang.

They arose, the blond speaking first, "I'm Nils Larsen, a genetics

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major from West Covina. At this table we prayed to two gods to guide your feet here. Amal, my roommate, is Mohammedan."

The dark boy came to attention and his heels clicked. "Amal Eugene Severn, seismologist, transfer student from Baghdad. We are honored."

Lyn decided she had selected the wrong boy as the student prince. The Arabian waited with haughty disdain as Nils Larsen seated her and turned the taple lamp low to indicate the table had been chosen.

Amal Severn stood at attention until Lyn was seated—and when he sat he sat at attention.

"You did seem preoccupied," Lyn said to Nils, "but I had no idea you were praying."

"We started praying—Amal was chanting, really; he's a part-time muezzin on a Baghdad minaret—the moment you started to stride across the stage, looking for all the world like Diana, the Huntress."

Scratch one blond beast, she thought and turned her attention to Amal. The Arabian seemed hypnotized by the locket watch nestled in the cleavage three inches above the V in her blouse. Though slightly discomfited by his gaze, she smiled at him and said, "Let Amal speak for himself."

"We're quite pleased," Amal said in a clipped British accent.

He kept his gaze on her locket.

"You've studied at Oxford?"

"Never."

"His father was English," Nils volunteered. "His mother was Arabian."

The father accounted for the gray eyes so transparent they resembled windows opening onto vast deserts, but the eyes unsettled her with their steady gaze.

"What are your hobbies?" she asked Nils.

"Languages. I speak several. Amal's are horsemanship and archery."

"I rather suspected Amal's might be horology."

Amal tore his eyes from her watch and turned to Nils, speaking in Arabic. In profile, she noticed, he resembled a bust of Julius Caesar. Lyn understood one word and it was enough to tell her he was asking Nils the definition of horology.

Nils answered him in Arabic and Amal turned to her. She caught a note of disapproval in his voice. "I was not looking at your watch."

"Amal comes from a part of Iraq where women still cover their faces," Nils intervened, embarrassed. "He's only been in this country two weeks."

"Please tell Amal that my costume is designed to the specifications of the ball committee."

"Be so kind as to speak to me directly," Amal said. "I am not royalty."

He looked at her with a hauteur that made her wish he would return his gaze to her watch. Obviously he

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was suffering from advanced cultural shock caused by his transfer from Iraq to the United States and he might have been lying about his lack of royal lineage. He made her feel like a peasant.

"I take it that you disapprove of my dress?"

"Does it matter? I am not Allah."

One would never know it from his behavior, she decided. Something was going rapidly wrong with her premonition. She had chosen a table graced by a cliche user and a snob.

SHE turned to Nils. He was beginning to look better. Despite the cliche, his thoughts were not yet obvious and he was handsome and mannerly.

"What's the theme of tonight's spectacular?"

"Reenactment of a Black Mass from the Middle Ages, complete with human sacrifices featuring a real human. A student depressed by his high B average, which is low for Cal Tech, is going to let himself be killed in plain view of the audience. If you're not already a devil worshiper, get ready to be converted."

Lyn made a moue of disapproval and Nils asked, "Aren't you interested in the occult?"

"Such ideas aren't toys to be played with," she said. "They can be dangerous. There are dark areas in the human psyche."

"You have thought about these things?" Amal surprised her with the question and the intentness with which it was asked.

"My grandmother was a parapsychologist," she said. "She taught me to withhold judgment on the so-called psychic phenomena."

"Come now, Lyn," Nils said. "If you can't weigh it or measure it, it doesn't exist. So relax and enjoy the fairy tale."

"Some subjects upset me," Lyn said.

"Does violence disturb you?"

"It does," Lyn answered Amal's strangely oblique question, "if the producer makes it seem real enough."

"Then I will be kind to inform you—" Amal began, but Nils interrupted him, speaking in Arabic.

Amal listened and shrugged, saying, "If that is your custom."

Amal had wanted to tell her something and Nils had given him a verbal kick in the shins. As if in apology, Amal turned to her and said, "May I offer you tea?"

"Perhaps Lyn doesn't like tea," Nils said.

"I will buy. She will drink," Amal said. He clapped his hands above his head and a student waiter came running. Nils looked across the table as if embarrassed by Amal's manner. Lyn smiled at him.

"I will drink tea," she told Nils.

The Arabian's hauteur was beginning to intrigue her. He was not handsome, but he was different and

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Nils seemed awed by him. Lyn's interest was mostly clinical. She could get no impression of Amal's thoughts—possibly he was thinking in Arabic. In any event, he had none of the openness of an American boy. He had the features of a desert hawk and the manners of a sheik, she thought, and he needed to be tamed as well as acculturated.

Casually Lyn probed Amal with a seemingly innocuous question, actually one of the key questions used in socio-psychological interrogation procedures. "Why do you study seismology?"

"My mother was killed in an earthquake."

He answered with a vehemence that suggested a personal vendetta against temblors and was more significant to her than his expressed motive. On a Freudian level his emotionalism revealed Oedipal antagonisms toward the shaking earth, though a Jungian might assert that the earthquake symbolized Amal's libido. Lyn had heard too many rumors about desert sheiks to discount the Jungians entirely.

"Do you like this country?" Lyn asked.

"It has been very generous."

"I take your answer as a diplomatic 'No,' and if you're having trouble adjusting to our culture, why not call on me professionally. I have an opening next Wednesday at three-thirty."

Her offer was genuinely given. If she decided to reject him when the bell rang she wanted to keep an option to meet him later. He might merit a footnote on a paper she was planning on cultural shock.

Amal neither agreed nor disagreed to her proposal. Instead he asked, "Is this Doctor Kley for whom you work the chairman of the board of supervisors?"

"Yes," she said and turned to Nils.

"Why did you choose Cal Tech, a local school, when you had the whole country to select from?"

"The genetics department here is the best. Doctor Heywood has a solid staff around him and genetics is where the action is."

They were interrupted by the waiter bringing tea and Lyn was grateful for a chance to change the subject. On her last outing at Cal Tech she had chosen a specialist in cosmic rays and he had bombarded her with talk of mesons.

Lyn proposed a toast to their impromptu host and the three touched cups at the center of the table. "To the junior Ozymandias, our seismologist, may his caravans be always richly laden."

Her obscure allusion to a desert tyrant, taken from an English poem, would be accepted as a compliment by Amal, she felt sure, since he was a seismologist and had never been to Oxford.

He responded promptly and with a flicker of a smile: "To the new

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Helen of Troy, our psycho-sociologist. May her watchtowers never topple."

She was immediately suspicious of his toast. Since he had been in the States long enough to learn that U.S.C. was called Troy, his twisting of "socio-psychologist" might have been deliberate. His further reference to her toppling watchtowers sounded more than faintly like a double entendre.

Suddenly she was enjoying both of her table companions in a manner seldom permitted her. No banal thoughts from either had intruded on her mind. Toward Amal she reacted as a completely normal girl and all she could pick up from Nils was an occasional fit of discomfiture when he felt Amal was being too imperious.

"It's going to be hard to choose between you two," she confessed. "I wonder if I could get a rules change and keep you both."

A *"CARAMBA!"* keened from a table across the aisle before either could answer and Nils turned to look back at the sound. From her position Lyn looked directly across and saw Lola Oachoa rise and spew Spanish at one of the boys at her table, apparently a Chicano. An Anglo, still seated, looked stupefied as Lola arched back in *flamenco* haughtiness, pointed to the stag area and told the Mexican, *"Vamose!"*

The boy stood up but did not go. He volleyed Spanish back at her and Nils, twisting his head sideways, explained to Lyn that the boy was protesting Lola's selection of a Gringo as a betrayal of Spanish honor.

So recently buoyed by an American wolf whistle, Lyn sided with the patriot. Even more recently subjected to the hauteur of a sheik, she found that her sympathy went to the boy when, according to Nils' rapid translation, Lola heaped aristocratic scorn on the Chicano she was rejecting.

Finally she must have cast aspersions on the Mexican's virility, for he yelled, *"Puta!"*

It was not a polite designation for a female either in Los Angeles or Madrid, but it must have been accurate, Lyn decided, for beneath the girl's exterior beat the heart of a Spanish gypsy. Her hand whipped to the high comb in her hair, and a stiletto flashed. With a side-arm sweep, she swung the knife toward the boy's rib cage.

He threw out his palm, chopping her arm at the elbow, caught her wrist with his free hand and shortened the arc of the weapon. The stiletto plunged into a heaving bosom. Nearby, a girl screamed and Lyn relaxed, knowing no heart beat beneath Lola's silicone mounds. Unseen by Nils, Amal had reached over and clasped her hand to gain her attention. Looking toward him, she saw him shake his

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head to her in warning. The act was a part of the show.

Masculine laughter drowned feminine shrieks as the wounded girl staggered into the aisle, stumbled forward, tripped lightly onto the stage and pulled the stiletto from her chest. The blood flowing from the puncture swooped back into the wound. Holding the weapon in her hand, she made a sweeping bow as a voice sounded over the PA system: "Introducing Lola Oachoa, Cal Tech's answer to Onan."

Lola hurled the stiletto into the planking of the stage and began a Mexican hat dance around it to the recorded music of a marimba. A gynodrone of metal and plastic, directed by a computer within the torso Lyn had envied, wove voluptuous patterns on the stage, and the girl who modeled it, Lyn realized, might now be in a convent in Spain. Programed a little differently, the dark mannikin well might writhe to different rhythms at less public spectacles in this tower where certain students no doubt hoped its duties would be shared by a blond replica of Lyn Oberlin.

Lyn was disgusted. At that moment she could have stalked from the hall, but she remembered the pressure of Amal's hand as he had warned her of the spurious violence. The Arabian might be haughty, but he was kind—and possibly he had not been at Cal Tech long enough to be tempted by the fabrications of the Daedalus Society. True, he was proud and arrogant, but training and natural endowments had equipped her to hood a desert hawk.

Besides, it would be fun to tame him. The touch of his hand in hers had been strong, gentle and thrilling.

A bell clanged through the pleasure dome. The time had come for the girls to make their final choices.

Lyn stood and the two across from her arose to accept her formal announcement. "Gentlemen, I choose Amal Severn as my date for the evening."

"Thank you for considering me, Lyn," Nils said. "My congratulations, Amal."

Amal went rigid, clicked his heels and said, "I am honored."

She had her work cut out for her, she decided, dating a boy who sat and stood at attention. She turned to Amal.

"We're not spending our evening in this computerized bawdy house watching a sophomoric Black Mass. I'm driving you into the country to show you something really spectacular. To hell with simulated realism."

She took his arm to escort him from the pleasure dome and a slight squeeze told her his muscles, though wiry, were as strong as corded cables. As they turned to go she caught her first coherent impression from the mind of Nils

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Larsen, not a thought but an emotion powerful enough to reach her at a casual glance. When they strode from the hall she knew she was creating history of sorts as the first girl to walk out of a Cal Tech Ball, but she was more concerned with the impression she had picked up from Nils.

A strong but subtle feeling had reached her from his mind—a mixture of chagrin over his loss, a leaping hope for Amal and, deeper still, a great sadness too diffuse for her to pinpoint without staring at him.

II

"BREAD and circuses," Amal muttered, settling into the seat of the Dunemaster as it swung onto the freeway guide band.

Inserting a routing card into the auto's automatic steering component, Lyn looked over at him. "Bread and circuses?"

"The gifts Nero used to keep the Romans happy," he said. "Today it's automobiles and spectaculars."

"I can't complain about Nero," she said, miffled by his condescension toward the automobile she treasured. "This car can climb seventy-degree slopes and if it flips, the cockpit stays upright. It has its own television set."

"You've got a burr in your right Venturelli nozzle," he said, unimpressed. "If you bore me tonight,

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you can watch television while I file the burr from your nozzle."

Outside, he seemed much more relaxed than he had been in the pleasure dome.

"At times," she said, "I almost think you have a sense of humor, but I'm not yet sure."

"You're a psychologist. You should know—by insight. Tell me, can you really help the kooks?"

"We never call the kooks 'kooks,' " she said. "And I can help them. Usually all they need is someone to talk to."

"What do you treat?"

"Cultural maladaptation mostly. Many transfer students become depressed by their environmental shift."

"You mean they are homesick?"

"Yes, but that term doesn't dignify an ailment which, in extreme cases, can lead to suicide. I send some of my patients to simulated environments near San Bernardino which are modeled on their homelands. If you ever get a craving for a burnoose or a camel give me a ring."

"Not until you've visited the tipis in the American compound in my country," he said.

"Oh, we have cowboys and Indians here, too. Our historical research villages are widely used by scholars from all over the world."

They fell silent. He was intent on the passing towers of Civic Center bathed in klieg lights that obscured the moon. The only sound was the sibilance of wind over the cockpit dome and she studied his features in the glow from the Center. As immobile as a carving, his face conveyed an impression of a powerful, implacable will, but revealed not one iota of his thoughts. She could not have read his mind easily had he been thinking in English. In more ways than one he reduced her to the role of a typical American girl and she enjoyed it.

He watched the blue tower of Echo Park and the silver tower of Silver Lake wheel by; he neither spoke nor made any attempt to move closer to her. Suddenly she feared she might lose this arrogant yet fascinating Moslem—his taste in females might be too exotic. Then she assured herself that her anxiety was premature. She had inserted the guide card to Yosemite Park on the theory that snow and water, by its novelty, should turn on a Bedouin. When they passed the Wilshire District tower and he had still said nothing she began to wonder if he might have felt more secure in the Mojave Desert.

As the Dunemaster sped past the base of Hollywood's purple tower he glanced up and she detected an expression on his face. "Don't suggest we stop for a drink," she commented. "Nice girls aren't seen in the Hollywood Tower."

He had no such intentions.

"A seven-point-five earthquake would send the pods popping off

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that stanchion like popcorn off a red-hot stalk."

SHE liked the simile and, with the memory of mesons bombarding her brain, she wanted to avoid all talk of his specialty, but she could not let the implied slur on the city government pass.

"Los Angeles is earthquake conscious. Doctor Kley is very strict about enforcing our building codes."

"Then he should review the codes and do it quickly."

"Are you predicting an earthquake?"

"They are not yet predictable. But I'm working on it. At the moment I am having a problem with my model."

"Problems! Problems!" she interjected hurriedly, parroting the favorite expression of Dr. Kley. "Have you visited this section of Los Angeles before?"

"Farther north I hiked along a segment of the San Andreas Fault. It was—"

"It's truly an interesting area. In a few minutes we'll pass Old Fort Tejon—"

"I know. It was destroyed by a quake in—"

"Nearby is the Skinhead Reservation."

"Skinhead. What an odd name."

She seized on the diversion, saying, "They shave their heads for religious reasons. It's a protected cultural enclave where the women can have tax-free babies and ecologists can study the effect of population imbalance on the environment. I once wrote a paper on them. They are free of all city ordinances and Doctor Kiefer, their leader, used to teach economics at U.S.C. He's so turned against technology he won't even allow a radio on the preserve."

"They must be attractive people."

"Attractive? I wouldn't get near one."

"Then how did you write a paper on them?"

To keep his mind off seismology Lyn gave him a sprightly and detailed account of the methodology for writing a passable socio-psychological paper by abstracting data from other publications.

"Then you write a paper about other papers."

"I—well, I refine concepts," she explained, "and correlate previously established data."

"Ah, so," he said and glanced at the moon.

His look at the moon encouraged her and she fell silent, hoping he might move closer. Around them the winter-darkened hills of the Ridge Route began to rise in the moonlight.

"This road crosses the San Andreas Fault three times," he finally said. "If an earthquake broke the guide bands, cars would splatter like eggs among these boulders."

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"Yes, I'm sure. By the way, Amal—on your right is the Angeles Crest Hunting Preserve, second largest in the country."

"What is hunted?"

"Deer, bear, elk, when the conservationists release them. Condemned criminals when they're available."

"You hunt men in this country?"

She was surprised by the disapproval implicit in his tone.

"Yes. To reduce tax assessments through the sale of hunting licenses. It's quite fair. A criminal can choose between the hunting preserve and the gas chamber and only seven hunters are permitted to hunt at the same time. If he escapes to the skinheads he may be given sanctuary—if the skinheads don't trade him for supplies."

"Nero was a humanitarian," Amal said.

"It's not Nero's bread and circuses," she said. "The idea is based more on William James' 'moral equivalent of war.' One felon escaped, then volunteered to exchange himself for skinhead supplies, went in and escaped the second time. After that he was free until he committed another crime."

Amal glanced at the moon and said, "I envy that man. He accepted the challenge and won."

At least she had lured him away from earthquakes, she thought, though he had some strange ideas. She had never met anyone who criticized authority so quickly without quoting sources, though she did not expect him, a foreigner, to share her enthusiasm for the democratic process, particularly since he was so autocratic. On the other hand, he was alien and fascinating and, from the way his eyes kept flickering to the moon, he might be romantic.

"Isn't the moon beautiful tonight?"

"Not while it's there and we're here."

"Why there and here?"

"It's directly opposite the sun relative to the Earth and the opposite gravitational pulls exert a tidelike effect on the planet's interior plasma, maximizing the strain on the Earth's crust. I've rigged a device for measuring stress along the planet's fault line . . ."

SHE yielded. She would let him talk out his fears—did they constitute temblorphobia? She might at least get a paper out of this evening.

Listening with half an ear she interrupted him only once—after he complained: "If I could get into the Cal-Edison moholes, I could install stress sensors on the fault lines seven thousand meters down."

"I could make arrangements to get you the permit," she suggested.

"If you could it might give me all the instrumentation I'd need to predict the next quake."

"I'll use my influence," she promised.

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THE MAN WHO FOLDED HIMSELF

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RANDOM HOUSE

Using her influence, in this instance, meant pulling a request for a tour of the moholes from a filing cabinet and stamping Dr. Kley's name at the bottom, but she refused to tell Amal because she did not wish to destroy the mystique of government administration. She wanted this young man, whose face was almost handsome by moonlight, to feel indebted to her.

When in doubt grant a favor, Dr. Kley had always told her and Kley was her ideal politician.

At the end of the guide band at El Portal, Amal's enthusiasm had swept him closer to her—to demonstrate the coefficients of friction between land masses—and she let him handle the wheel as they drove into the Park. Only then did he grow silent, awed by the majesty and wintry beauty of Yosemite.

A thin skim of unplowed snow, freshly fallen, lay over the road between previously plowed banks and, as he drove beside the winding Merced, she commented on the ease with which he handled the vehicle even as he stared at the scenery. He seemed instinctively to adjust for curves and he was not driving at a snail's pace.

"My, you're a good driver. Where did you learn?"

"Dodging camel caravans in the streets of Baghdad," he said and she detected irony in his remark.

"You must think I'm terribly provincial?"

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"How could I? I don't know what 'provincial' means. But if I wreck the car you'll have to claim you were driving. I have no license."

"Why not?"

"I'm not a citizen."

"That shouldn't prevent a person from getting a driver's license."

"It did me."

To permit him a view of the park she directed him in a circle past Wahanee Lodge, brightly lighted among the pines. Hearing music, she asked, "Do you dance?"

"Superbly."

"Would you like to come back here and dance after I've shown you Bridal Veil Falls?"

"No."

Well, that settled that, she thought.

Above them, El Capitan and Half Dome reflected the moon's glow onto the valley floor and diffused it in a mist of light through the snow-bent evergreens of the forest. Entranced by the scenery and unable to suppress her enchantment, Lyn breathed a soft and reverent, "Wow."

He echoed her sentiments. "This is a lovely spot—as holy and enchanted as any beneath a waning moon ever haunted by an houri weeping for her Moslem lover."

His felicity of phrase after her simplistic expression left her vaguely chagrined as they parked at the foot of the path leading to the falls. She busied herself getting thermal coveralls for them both from the luggage compartment and soon they were garbed against the cold. Trudging ahead of her, Amal broke a path through the crust of the new snow toward the roar of the waterfall.

Black in the moonlight, the water poured from a precipice high above them, its outer spray falling as snowflakes. The roar from the cascade precluded normal conversation as they stood sharing the beauty in silence, but sharing it separately. Convention called for a kiss on this spot; but Amal did not even offer to take her hand.

Covertly she studied his profile. In the line of his jaw, in the predator's nose was the feel of deserts. She could almost see the wheel and charge of Arabian horses beneath burnoosed tribesmen and hear above hoofbeats the war cries of Saracens. All Amal saw or heard was falling water.

Cupping her hands toward his ear, she said, "They're called the Bridal Veil Falls because the mist resembles a white veil. Do Arabs still take brides?"

He cupped one hand to the side of his mouth and answered without looking down, "Only when they like to baby-sit."

"I heard Arabian men keep harems."

"I heard American girls prefer an androne called 'Ken' to living boys."

What he had heard was true but there was more. According to the

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most recent poll, girls in Lyn's age group preferred the gynodrone, Barbie, over the androne, Ken. But this was no place to lecture a foreigner on the American system for maintaining a zero population growth.

Suddenly he lowered his head and put his lips close to her earlobe. He smelled of cedar and sandalwood. "Let's go. I've seen enough."

VEXED and disappointed, she turned and crunched through the snow ahead of him back toward the car, wondering if in Persia kissing girls was a taboo on the order of eating pork or wearing shoes in a mosque. As the roar from the falls receded she caught the strains of beginning music from the lodge and wished she had chosen Nils Larsen.

Overtaking her, Amal said, "Thank you for bringing me. Yosemite is perhaps the third most beautiful phenomenon I have ever seen."

His words were labored, spoken with difficulty, and she wondered if the altitude or the language bothered him.

"Do tell," she said with a hauteur he might never equal. "You must describe the first two on our way back to Los Angeles—while I watch television."

Putting his hand on the car door, he paused before opening it long enough to cause her to look up at him. Obviously, now, he was struggling to form his thoughts into English.

"I cannot even describe Yosemite which is third most beautiful. How, therefore, could I describe the Vale of Shalimar, which is first in beauty, or Lyn Oberlin, who is second?"

Impulsively she cupped his face in her palms and kissed lightly the lips which had not compared her to Diana, the Huntress.

"Why, Amal, that's the most delightful compliment!"

For the first time he smiled. Rather, his expression was more a shamefaced, embarrassed grin, and she was as positive as she could be by moonlight that he was blushing. She was amazed at the novelty and at her own miscalculation—what she had assumed to be the haughty aloofness of a desert sheik was the brittle shyness of an inexperienced boy.

Amal Eugene Servern was afraid of girls.

"Amal, you're blushing!" She laughed. "And I was beginning to think you disapproved of me."

"I have never been with a girl without a chaperone," he confessed. "What do American boys say to a girl who is not a mathematician?"

"If they're very clever they tell her she's a little less beautiful than the Vale of Shalimar and a little more beautiful than Yosemite. I hope you never learn to think in English."

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"But I do think in English."

He had finally opened the door and she slid into the cockpit. She was surprised by his remark. She had decided that her inability even to gain a glimmer of meaning from his facial expressions had been partly caused by the language barrier. Some other element in his psyche must be throwing his thoughts out of her focal range.

"You must have been a very good student of languages," she said.

"Only of English and Hindi," he said. "When I studied English it was almost as if I were remembering my native tongue. It gave me an eerie feeling, beginning with my sense of familiarity with the alphabet, and sometimes I found myself remembering—or thinking I remembered—a word or phrase I had never heard before."

She found herself reluctant to start the motor. She was interested in what he said and she did not want their evening to end on a discord, however muted.

"Memory auras are quite common in older people," she said. "In the young they're called *deja vu.*"

"It's more than an aura," he said. "Sometimes I feel only a thin veil separates me from another life. At times I've used unfamiliar phrases, even Americanisms, that popped into my mind. Then, too, I've felt fragments of emotions that I should not feel."

"Have you ever spoken to a psychologist?" she asked.

"Only to you," he said. "I did not wish to be considered crazy. Tonight, when you spoke of dark areas of the mind, I felt that you might understand. Besides, I know that the ethics of your profession forbid you to speak of secrets."

All he said was true and quite perceptive. His secrets would be protected by her, not only because of ethics but of law. Her own mind held mysteries, but unfortunately she could not confide in him with immunity.

"Are you troubled with nightmares or recurring dreams?"

"When I was a boy I used to experience one dream a lot," he said, "but it was far from being unpleasant. I dreamed I introduced my father to my creche mother and they fell in love."

His dream was neither Oedipal nor uncommon, she recognized. Children often preferred the women who bore them to their genetic mothers.

SHE could not speak as freely to him as he to her, but an understanding of his problem might help her understand her own, if she could overcome his shyness and keep him with her a while longer. The distant music gave her an inspiration. His hand lay beside her on the seat and she reached over and placed hers over it, looking at him pleadingly. Her touch was designed to reassure him and her look to give him ego confidence.

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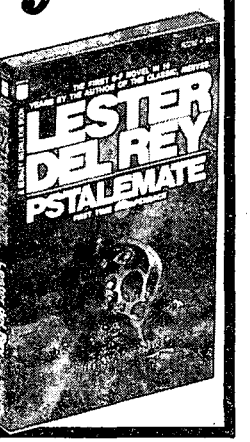

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"Amal, they're dancing at the lodge. If it's not against your religion—would you take me there tonight?"

She was following the recommended procedure for dealing with sexual timidity—a bashful person should be given a line of retreat. He could use religion as a reason to refuse her, but she had caught him in a moral and emotional vise. A refusal would be tantamount to deserting a friend.

"In the creche," he stammered, "we were taught to dance horizontally. You Americans dance vertically."

She squeezed his hand reassuringly. "I studied classical dancing in high school. Maybe we can manage together."

Her use of the word "we" was designed to establish familiarity and a sense of joint purpose.

"It would be my pleasure to join with you in a dance," he said. The stilted formalism in his answer suggested to her that he had been reared in a sexually segregated creche.

"Would you care to drive?"

"You betcha!" he said. She did not understand the term "betcha," but assumed it was an Arabic expression of enthusiasm.

They entered the lodge. She realized that she had forgotten she wore the costume of another century under the thermal jacket she peeled off in the cloakroom. The Saturday night crowd in the ballroom, mostly collegians, also

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reminded her as she followed the head waiter across the dance floor backlighted by a now empty bandstand. Apparently unruffled by the cheers and whistles, Amal seated her at the table at the edge of the dance floor from which the waiter removed a RESERVED sign. She would have preferred a more obscure table and less deference from the waiter, but Amal, strangely at ease, seemed to expect the attention that drew the unvoiced envy of the patrons surrounding them.

Scanning the faces of the females closest to them, reading their thoughts, Lyn realized that Amal's shyness was in no way created by feminine rejection. To a person as perceptive as he was proving to be, his attractiveness for the opposite sex would be apparent. As he studied the wine list, the waiter attentive beside him, she was struck by an idea so grotesque the absurdity of its logic held her. Could Amal have been conditioned to sexual constraint? She knew shyness was easily induced in the human psyche—one rebuff to a sensitive child could make him or her self-restrained as an adult.

She glanced up and saw at a glance that the waiter, too, was engrossed in puzzlement—how did this young man rate a State Department green credit card?

How, indeed? Lyn's thoughts veered to the new mystery. Having preceded him at the entrance she had paid no attention to his credit card, assuming it to be the pink card of the ordinary transfer student. Green cards of unlimited credit were issued by the State Department to ambassadors, visiting heads of state, heirs of royal houses and other very important persons.

Amal had said he was not royalty, but the statement could have been a modest disclaimer. He could be related to an oil sheik and conditioned to shyness to preclude his involvement with girls of the commonalty. The idea was worth investigating.

Amal asked her deferentially if he might recommend the Thracian Andros and she said she would be delighted. He handed the wine list to the waiter who scurried away. Without the menu to distract him he seemed ill at ease and she undertook to lead the conversation.

"I didn't think Moslems used alcohol."

He smiled. "My Moslemism was Nils's idea of a joke, so I went along with him. Actually I'm Coptic Christian."

LESS familiar with Coptic Christians than with Thracian Andros, she changed the subject. "How did you come to select a geneticist as a roommate?"

"Oh, I'm not a bigot. He wanted someone to practice Arabic with and I need a housekeeper and a handyman. So I took him in."

His smile took the edge off his implied bias and she noticed his

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speech was growing more relaxed. He was beginning to feel at ease with her.

"For once I'm overwhelmed by the service at the Wahanee," she ventured. "Did someone whisper to the waiters that you were the son of a shah?"

"It was you who impressed them."

"I'm not that conspicuous. One would think you had a green credit card."

"So you noticed," he said. "With me it's not a status symbol. My experiments are considered important, so your government gave me the green card to let me finance my research without the delay of applying for grants."

She knew a scholastic grant rarely took longer then two weeks to process. His experiments must have a very high priority if they were pursued with such urgency.

"Aren't they afraid you might buy a yacht and sail to Tahiti?"

"Whoever 'they' are, they knew I'd never have thought of doing so—until I met you. I lead a monastic and dedicated life, very humdrum except for those unrecalled memories and a few strange urges."

"What strange urges?" she asked, but the waiter had come with the wine, pouring Amal a sip and standing back.

Amal tasted it.

"Waiter, this wine is processed, not aged. Greeks feed this swill to their pigs. Haven't you any naturally aged wine?"

"Let me check again, sir," the waiter said and Lyn, glancing up, saw that he was thinking: *I would try to palm it off on a connoisseur . . .*

Lyn was amused by the waiter's chagrin, but Amal turned to her apologetically. "I'm sorry to have to berate him in your presence, but he would have charged me for more expensive wine and I must protect your government's money."

"You find such deceit, nowadays," she said, "even while honesty's praised as the chief virtue."

"The dishonest preach honesty to gain an advantage over the trusting," he said. "Still, I'd rather trust ten dishonest men than distrust one honest man."

His thoughts seemed to move in deeper channels than those of American boys, she observed, but she was beginning to admit a prejudice toward Amal.

"What are your strange urges?" she repeated.

"They're weird," he said. "I'll be intent on my work when suddenly I'll be shaken by a feeling that I should be somewhere else, testing truths that will test me. It's more than a feeling. It's a knowledge, certain, factual. I often imagine I'm a puppet, dangling on the wrong strings, in the wrong puppet show, before the wrong audience."

Concealing a certain feeling of

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self-recognition, she remarked, "Perhaps it's your isolation. It's positively abnormal that you've never been alone with a girl."

"Not for a boy from a Coptic creche," he said. "We met our creche sisters only on formal occasions and we were trained to treat them as visiting royalty. Meeting you, an American girl, fissured my fault lines."

"No wonder." She smiled. "You must have gained a distorted impression of girls."

"Oh, I had my creche mother, a gracious and beautiful woman. She devoted most of her attention to me after my father and mother were killed. But I lost her when I was fourteen—in the great Iranian quake."

She tried to divert him from an obviously unpleasant memory. "Were you injured in the quake?"

"No. I was in Baghdad. Mother was lying-in at an Iranian Coptic creche. The entire creche fell into a fissure. The fools in Baghdad didn't keep the newspapers from me with all the lurid details. For a while I was shattered. It was then I decided to try to find a method for predicting such catastrophes."

Whether he knew it or not he had outlined to her, step by step, a classic example of Pavlovian conditioning which had forced him into the study of seismology. The remoteness of the opposite sex had brought him closer to a beautiful and idealized mother-figure—who was swallowed by the planet. The *mythos* was almost more than Lyn's credo could accept. She was vaguely aware that intrigue was still practiced in the Middle East. Amal might have been conditioned to become obsessed with earthquakes in order to deprive him of his inheritance in some oil-sheikdom. Of course the idea was absurdly romantic, almost as far-fetched to a psychologist as the idea that fate, itself, was purely Pavlovian.

"No wonder you would like another set of memories," she said.

"But the memory I spoke about has nothing to do with my life or times."

THE waiter returned with another bottle of wine, ceremoniously wiping off the dust in their presence. The vintage passed Amal's test. It was a dry wine, flavored slightly with licorice. Lyn voiced her appreciation for it, though for all she knew it could have been one week removed from the Napa Valley.

Her own life had been shadowed by rare and inexplicable episodes wherein she could see visions so acute they frightened her. It might help Amal to know that others passed through dark areas, but reticence had become ingrained in her. He was not bound by law or ethics to preserve her confidences and there were areas to her own—neuroticism?—that she would have to hold inviolate if only to protect

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his opinion of her. But he had confided in her, saying he could not risk distrusting an honest man. Morally she was wrong to distrust a man who trusted her—and by confiding a little she might reassure him much.

"Amal, I'll confess a secret, too," she said abruptly. "I knew you had a green card because I read the waiter's mind."

"From his attentiveness?"

"More than that. By studying his face. I can read a person's complete thought units, not verbally—few thoughts are verbalized—but when they are strongly amazed or upset their thoughts come to me through their facial expressions."

"Oh, come, Lyn. Such things are as impossible as—as a dual memory." He smiled, speared by his own logic. "Can you demonstrate your ability?"

"I confess that with you I can't. At first I thought it was because you were thinking in Arabic. Now I don't know what it is. But you defy me."

"Let's test you," he said. "Study my face carefully and I'll verbalize a very important message to you."

"My gaze might frighten you."

"I don't scare easily. Study me now."

She focused her vision on him openly, tuning her mind to receive every nuance of expression in his face. All she garnered from the man across the table was a sensation of whirling energy. She felt herself on the edge of some vast, dark maelstrom and it was she who looked away. Her receptors had picked up nothing of what he was thinking.

She brought her eyes into normal focus and confessed her failure.

Fully at ease now, he smiled. "I was rearranging in my mind the order of the three greatest wonders of my world. When were you first aware of your gift?"

" 'Gift' is hardly the word." She smiled. "As I discovered to my sorrow in the first grade when I started answering my classmates before they asked questions. They accused me of being a witch and one afternoon a group of the more active girls surrounded me on the playground and tried to stone me. The little dears had heard that stoning was the way to destroy a witch. I broke through their circle and outraced them, but not before they had taught me to keep my mouth shut. The irony of it was that a decade later witchcraft became fashionable in the elementary school set. By then they would have made me den mother of a coven."

He reached over to squeeze her hand. "You can smile now, but the experience must have been shattering to the little girl you were."

THE concern in his voice touched her so deeply she almost lost her composure, but his gray eyes steadied her with their strength and calmness.

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"Oh, that was only a part of it. I was spared the full shame of ostracism because shortly thereafter my parents moved to the West Coast. But eight years later my class was given the secondary-school placement profile tests. The segment of the tests concerning the psi factor, relating to telepathy and clairvoyance, was conducted by a parapsychologist. He was especially concerned about my answers—I knew this from reading his mind—so I became particularly concerned to give him the wrong answers. When he looked them over I could read his disappointment and the thought: *Well, they're wrong again.*

"A moment ago you spoke of puppets. Are 'they' pulling the strings? Or is it paranoia that leads me to ask? I don't think so, particularly now that I've talked to you, but at times I considered that I might be a kook. Probably that's why I studied psychology, to learn more about my own mind, and obtained a job with the government, the better to be able to discover who 'they' are."

Amal nodded and said. "It's as if 'they' were waiting for you to show up—and you failed to keep your appointment?"

"That was precisely my impression."

"Maybe you're the implant daughter of a medium and the parapsychologist had been alerted."

"No. My own mother bore me. I come from a long line of child-bearing women. And my parents could have told no one. Their relationship was undergoing a strain at the time, so I kept my secret from them. Knowing their thoughts, I didn't wish to be a tale-bearer between them."

"That situation itself must have been a burden to a child."

"And after it the burden of trite thoughts foisted on me by associates, particularly ardent young men whose intentions and attitudes so often belie their words. So I'm thrilled indeed not to be able to demonstrate my 'gift' to you."

Beyond the dance floor the orchestra was returning. Glancing over, Amal said, "With luck and help from the band leader I may be able to prove to you my freak memory.

Rising, he took her hand and led her across the floor, moving with an ease that left her doubting her own theories. If he had been intensely conditioned to shyness, his timidity would not have been neutralized by a single moonlight ride with a girl. Such traits induced into a personality were overcome only by some wrenching emotional stress—rage, fear, despair—or by months of counter-conditioning.

At the podium a gray-haired conductor looked down and repeated Amal's request as if doubting it.

"A medley of dance music by early American composers?" But he said, "My pleasure, sir—" and

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pushed buttons on his music stand.

Turning to Lyn, Amal said, "This shouldn't be difficult for you. I'm a strong leader."

A strong leader with a superb sense of rhythm, and their heights matched. No one booed when he swung her onto the floor. She was familiar with the movement of the waltz from her classes in interpretative and classical dancing, but a novice would have had little difficulty. Dancing with Amal was an effortless gliding into the swirls and dips of the waltz.

The orchestra bridged between airs and swung into a new segment of the medley. Amal held her closer and breathed into her ear a phrase she assumed was an Arabic term of endearment, "Begintha begeen!"

No one joined them on the floor—the crowd remained seated, watching them in silence. Someone dimmed the house lights and a spotlight in the rafters was focused on them, cutting from their view the orchestra and the faces in the dark. In the cone of light they had only themselves and the music as he led through a tango, making her feel as weightless as a spinning, falling leaf controlled by an autumn breeze. As the music ended Amal swung her into a deep bow, catching and holding her on the final note, and the leaf had landed on a pool of still water.

APPLAUSE sounded as the lights came on. Straightening,

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they bowed in appreciation, both realizing that the audience, unfamilar with the dance, had assumed they were exhibition dancers.

The band swung into *The Berkeley Bounce,* and the vertical dancers poured onto the floor. Tacking back to their table, guarding her face from an exuberance of elbows, Lyn grieved for the ancient graces. After the Holocaust and two generations of zero population growth there was no necessity left for up-and-down dancing, but the old space-saving customs lingered.

At a table so close to the dancers that conversation was difficult above the thud of shoe soles on hardwood Amal clarified the phrase Lyn had mistaken for an Arabic term of endearment.

"Accept on faith that I know little about music and less about American composers. But the name of one of the melodies in the medley popped into my mind. I've never heard the title before, yet I'll wager that if you check the library tomorrow, you'll find listed an American dance, ***Begin the Beguine.***"

"We can test your memory in the parking lot. My Dunemaster has a telephone. We can call the information bank."

"Shall we go? Our position here's perilous."

She wanted to be alone with him and it was true that their table was in danger from the leaping dancers, but she was impelled to remind him, "What about the government's investment in Thracian Andros we're protecting? We've hardly touched it."

He grinned and revealed an unmistakable sense of humor, irony, and perhaps more. He said, "Let's leave it to the waiter as a reward for his honesty—he can recap it and sell it as an untouched bottle. Besides, I no longer need a social crutch."

His shyness had vanished so completely that she wondered if it could have been overcome by an emotion as strong as—but less negative than—anger, despair, or fear. Her thought smacked of vanity, she realized, but the idea warmed her as they suited and ran through the snow toward the car.

Inside the cockpit she felt an absurd and fluttering shyness as she pulled off her jumpshit to store it in the compartment. Merely the motion of undressing in his presence gave her virginal tremors, a thrill she was technically entitled to. For all his expression revealed, Amal, pulling off his jumpsuit beside her, could have been in a locker room of the boy's gym, an observation that proved a fact she had long ago deduced, that the better part of romance was mystery and that Tantalus, not Eros, should have been its god.

She set the telephone for a conference call and dialed the information bank. Leaning forward, she spoke slowly, enunciating each

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syllable carefully, "Music. American. Song title, *Begin the Beguine.*"

After a three-second delay, a recorded voice answered, "Composer, Cole Porter. Published, nineteen thirty-four."

She looked toward Amal and said, "Congratulations. Your American memory reaches back more than a hundred years."

"Ask it if there's a historical figure named Baby Ruth."

She asked and the bank replied, "There is no historical Baby Ruth."

"Baby Ruth is another expression that broke through to me when I was a boy in Baghdad," he explained. "It might have been the name of my sister who never distinguished herself. What happened in the U.S. in nineteen thirty-four?"

History was not Lyn's strong point, but she felt it was ungracious of her not to answer a foreigner's question about her country. "Some event of the first magnitude," she said hesitantly. "I think we either exploded an atom bomb or landed a man on the moon. But let me check. American history. First magnitude events. What happened in nineteen thirty-four?"

"Nothing," the mechanical voice replied.

"Second—or any magnitude?"

"Year of the Great Economic Depression which saw the consolidation of the theory of governmental paternalism under the presidency of Franklin Delano—"

She hung up, saying, "It could go on like that for hours, piling statistics on statistics. The city maintains historical periods in villages south of San Bernardino to permit research historians and antiquarians to absorb such trivia painlessly."

AMAL seemed not to be listening. His face held a look of intent vacuity, as if his mind were focused on wonderment. Almost to himself he said, "It could have been then."

He glanced at her, his mind obviously returning to the present, and said, "All night I've had a feeling that I met you before. I wonder if you were there. You remind me of an old-fashioned girl."

"It's probably my polka-dot dress, unless you're willing to accept the theory of reincarnation."

"I prefer statistical probabilities," he said. "A million monkeys making marks at random would eventually rewrite the Koran."

"That's not exactly the way I heard it." She smiled, moving closer to him. His arm was across the back of the seat and she was almost under it, pretending to pout. "If I had known you in nineteen thirty-four I would not have forgotten you in a mere century and a half."

He didn't move his arm down to comfort her.

"Of course it wasn't you, but you

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do seem to bring back a memory of emotion, evasive, indefinite, but strangely compelling."

"Describe it," she commanded.

"There's a sadness to it." His voice held a strange resonance—his eyes looked far away. For a moment she feared he was slipping into a trance. She shuddered. But he had merely been struggling to express the emotion in words. "It's a feeling of mild despair like the memory of a lost love, but there's a sense of triumph mixed with it, of having won something sought for—yet really not wanted.

"I'll describe the emotion in a parable," he said, suddenly alert. "Once in the past I loved a girl who rejected me for a suitor with better prospects. Years later I returned to the place of my birth to learn that the young banker whom my sweetheart married was in jail for embezzling bank funds . . . That's it—a sweet sadness mixed with a sad triumph."

She laughed at his strangely successful, though involved story and said, "You can always go back to nineteen thirty-four. It's on the subway to Hemet. For instant nostalgia, there's always Disneyland."

"It's not nostalgia," he said, taking her quip seriously. "I would be searching for my own memory. Say, Lyn, would you go back with me? I would like to court you—old style."

"Ye gods! Back in those days it took weeks for a boy to get up courage enough even to kiss a girl—and the women were too subjugated to kiss first."

"So what? That would be about my speed. Besides, the Epicureans held that bread was a feast for a hungry man. What wouldn't a starving fellow like me do with a lavish banquet—like you?"

She laughed. "Going to those places, even after hours and on weekends, costs money. Most of the researchers are there on grants."

"I have a green card. I could pay your way."

"Oh, no," she said. "I might be an old-fashioned girl but I'm nobody's old-fashioned mistress."

"See? You belong back there," he chortled. "Already you're worried about your virtue. I know you American girls believe in equal responsibilities and equal privileges, but I'm willing to pay you as a psychologist."

"I work in a free clinic," she said. "And I haven't got my doctorate. Still, you have a valid problem. And it's true—in the ambience of that time period you might have your memory restored."

She had enough self-awareness to recognize that she was working around to an agreement as she continued thoughtfully, "As a psychologist observing a committed patient I might pull a few strings and get a discount from the His-

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torical Artifacts Association. You call on me during my open session, Wednesday. By then I'll have your permit to enter the moholes and we can plan to investigate your fixation on the past."

His arm came down from behind her. He took her hand and kissed it in a circumspect and formal gesture of gratitude which nonetheless held a promise. Once she had overcome his shyness she knew he might relieve the tedium of the twentieth century in a spectacular manner.

"I'm paying my own way, Amal. That's definite. And I can't afford to give you more than three weeks' wooing time."

III

LYN'S initial reaction to the historical village, Dotham, Alabama, circa 1934, was hostile. After she arrived at the replica of a railroad station and changed into period dress in the station's dressing room she almost sprained an ankle trying to tote her suitcase across the waiting room in the high-heeled shoes of the era. She compounded her aggravation by calling the redcap who came to her aid "mister." With some embarrassment he corrected her error in the customs and traditions of the Old South. The error should never have occurred after all the reading she had done in *Gone with the Wind* in her Era Acculturation Class given by the Historical Society.

The town itself seemed static. The low wooden and brick buildings grouped around the square—a wooded plot featuring, of all things, the statue of a soldier—resembled boxes. These structures gave her none of the feeling of movement she got from the plastic towers of Los Angeles. A few citizens, mostly black, lounging on the station platform and the sidewalks contributed to the indolence of the scene. To the right, down the sidewalk, the marquee of an old-fashioned movie house, advertising Jean Harlow in *The Red-Headed Woman*, blatantly proclaimed its name: The Empire. Apparently "imperialism" was not a revolting word in 1934.

Balanced on the high heels, her breasts constricted into a shoulder halter, she had to wait twenty minutes in front of the station for a taxi, a boxlike vehicle decorated with garish black and white checkers, which clattered to the curb, its motor coughing in terminal throes. With the driver's aid she clambered up the footboard into the cab to discover its air-conditioning was *au naturel*—one raised or lowered a window. She had gotten Dr. Kley's permission to leave work early in order to greet her patient in the village when he arrived into a strange environment—but if the taxi service had not improved by 5:00 P.M.

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Amal would have to acclimate himself to his new surroundings without her professional assistance.

Beyond the business district, the taxi bore her through an area of white wooden houses with wide verandahs, set well back on tree-shaded lawns. The residential area seemed somnolent. It was an incredible fact to her, but she had been told that 60 percent of the inhabitants of this village, where the calendar was set back to 1930 at the end of each decade, were permanent defectors from the twenty-first century.

The Emerson's house, Lyn's destination, was twice isolated. It stood a half-mile beyond the pavement's end on a road that wound through trees, bridged a creek and curved north. Beyond a hedge, where a mailbox marked a gap in the hedge wall, the house was further concealed by a cluster of myrtle bushes.

The taxi driver carried Lyn's bag to a porch where a missing banister was scarcely noticeable—the whole house stood in need of a new coat of paint. But the Emersons, summoned to the porch by the rattle of the taxi to greet their new boarder, appeared to stand aloof and apart from the shabbiness of their residence.

Mr. and Mrs. Emerson were in their fifties, thin-faced and angular. Both were tall. The woman wore a black dress with long sleeves, the man overalls and a blue denim shirt with a high collar. From her briefing in Los Angeles, Lyn knew the Emersons were literary historians finishing up a two-year grant in Dotham. They had come to study the origins of science fiction, a remote literary excrudescence which had frothed briefly to the surface of twentieth-century literature before it was scummed off by scientific advances which had turned the genre's romantic conjecturings into low-comedy realism.

Lyn's room was the crowning disappointment of her day. Bare-floored, except for the oval rag rug beside a bed that held a hard mattress on creaking springs, the room was decorated by wall-paper that repeated endlessly a single rosebud. Lynn found a clothes closet but no private bath. The mirror on the dresser reflected a wavering image. Impelled by some mad impulse to decorate the non-decoratable, the Emersons had placed a squatty white vase with a lid over it not on the dresser but, of all places, under the bed.

MRS. EMERSON conducted Lyn on a tour of the premises, introducing her in the kitchen to Dilsey, the cook. Dilsey's effusive politeness in greeting the new boarder could not offset the further decline in Lyn's spirits a glance around the kitchen bought her. Cooking was done on a wood-burning stove. There was no refrigerator and no running water.

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"Where does one bathe?" Lyn asked Mrs. Emerson.

"On the back porch in summer. In the kitchen during winter. We use the wash tub and draw water from the well, which is right handy here on the back porch."

The wash tub was handy to the well but fifty feet of rope was wound around the well's windlass, indicating the water was not handy to the surface. Weekday mornings she would be working in the city, Lyn realized, so she could shower in her apartment. She would have to gloss over the four-day weekends with a pungent perfume.

Standing on the porch, Lyn needed to inquire no further about plumbing facilities. Plainly visible in the backyard stook a privy—and it was not handy to the back porch. She asked what provisions were made for one's toilet during dark nights or rainy weather.

"There's a chamber commode under your bed," Mrs. Emerson said.

Well, Lyn thought, the porcelain vase would not go onto the dresser, after all.

Standing on the porch, looking east toward a heavily wooded area, she heard strangely familiar grunts and squeals which prompted her to ask, "Is there a pigpen out yonder?"

"Yes," Mrs. Emerson said, with strange pride, "and a chicken house. Out here we raise our own ham and eggs."

Lyn stared dully at the wood lot. The accumulating lack of amenities had pyramided her disappointments and now the pigsty beyond the outhouse topped the pyramid. No champac odors, those. All the shimmering illusions of romance she might weave for Amal's imagination could be swept away by a zephyr from the east, Even so, with a bath so difficult to accomplish she might be hoping for an easterly breeze as a lesser evil at the end of an active weekend.

Small wonder courtship was such a slow process in the twentieth century, she thought ruefully—it had to await favoring winds.

Mrs. Emerson suggested they return to the parlor, sit a spell and get acquainted. Lyn followed her down a creaking hallway, dropped to a creaking horsehair settee and listened to Mr. Emerson, creaking in his rocking chair by the window as he read the sports section of the newspaper. Mrs. Emerson opened the conversation by inquiring what had brought Lyn to Dotham.

"I'm a psychologist, here to administer therapy to a young man with problems. Hopefully I intend to use the diversionary method by entertaining him—but what does one do for entertainment in Dotham?"

"Mr. Emerson and I have our work. Young people have church socials, ball games, moving-picture shows and, of course, courting. If you wish to entertain your fellow

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here we have a gramaphone—if he likes music. You have parlor privileges till ten, when we blow out the lamps. After ten you can use the porch swing, but only until eleven. Mr. Emerson and I must get our rest. Of course, there's the mill pond, but nice girls aren't found at the mill pond after ten-thirty at night."

"How does one get to the movies?"

"You catch the bus over at Johnny Reb's. Vernon and I seldom go. Jitney fare plus the show tickets for two come to seventy cents."

Lyn had seen Johnny Reb's on her way out. It was a frame building held together by tin advertising signs nailed to its walls and it stood a half-mile away, where the pavement on the road ended.

Her dejection must have shown on her face for she read clearly and without effort Mrs. Emerson's thoughts: *Poor girl, she's so hooked on diversions she'll never adjust to the real world.* Lyn was surprised; obviously Mrs. Emerson considered Dotham real and Los Angeles the illusion.

"MY PATIENT will arrive at the station at five o'clock," Lyn said, glancing at the clock on the fireplace mantel. "I suppose I should call a taxi and go meet him."

"That would be wasteful," Mrs. Emerson said. "The closest telephone's at the bus stop. The call would cost a nickel and the bus fare into town is only a nickel."

"Oh, fiddle-dee-dee!"

Lyn's ejaculation aroused Mr. Emerson. Looking up from his paper, he asked, "Miss Oberlin, where's your patient staying?"

"At the Culpepper farm."

"It's only about half a mile from here. He can walk it in fifteen minutes if he's not afflicted."

She supposed Mr. Emerson was right. Amal was to call for her at seven o'clock, though now she assumed it would be closer to seven-thirty. All she had seen here might still be for the best. Once Amal got a taste of primitive life he might speed up their courtship and get back to civilization.

Lyn's gloom was lifted when Dilsey entered to serve bowls of home-made ice cream and cookies. Putting aside his paper, Mr. Emerson joined in the repast and in the conversation which, according to the rules of the Historical Society, avoided discussion of any incident occurring after 1934. In the quiet social atmosphere, a mocking bird singing in the chinaberry tree outside, Lynn admitted to herself that the spirit of girlish adventure that had brought her here was unprofessional and the setbacks were all to the woman, not the therapist.

She had dismissed Amal's false memory as *deja vu.* The song, *Begin the Beguine,* had retained a

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measure of popularity over the years and the memory of it had simply been dragged from Amal's consciousness. His chief problem was his shyness, which could be overcome by close association with a sympathetic female therapist.

"I see by the paper, Emily," Mr. Emerson commented, "that Babe Ruth's claiming he'll hit sixty homers again this year."

"Who's Babe Ruth?"

Both smiled at the naivete of her question. Mr. Emerson answered, "Babe Ruth is the greatest baseball player who ever lived."

She was remembering Yosemite and the name she and Amal had fed to the information computer. The changed syllable in "Baby Ruth," insignificant to the human mind, would have made the input unreadable to the machine. To imagine that a boy in Iraq had ever heard of an American athlete playing a game never played in Iraq was as incredible as supposing that boy had a memory of a past America. Now she would have to reopen her mind to the validity of Amal's obsession.

As she weighed the information the sound of a motor car came from the north and Mr. Emerson, rising to go to the window, remarked, "Another pastime of ours is watching the cars go by."

Lyn arose and went to the screen door. She, too, was interested in ancient automobiles. Beyond the hedge in front of the house a strip of plowed ground offered an unimpaired view of approaching motorists.

She was watching as the car rounded the curve from behind a clump of trees. It was a sports roadster with the top down and wire spokes on the wheels, a beautiful machine by any standard of aesthetics. She glanced in envy at the driver. Despite the wool hat pulled low over his eyes, Lyn recognized Amal and flew through the doorway as the car vanished behind the hedge, braking to a stop before the Emerson's mailbox.

She was through the hedge before he turned off the motor.

"Where did you get this?"

Almost swaggering in blue jeans and a plaid shirt, he swung around the car, extending his hand in greeting. Since it was all he offered she accepted the handshake, her eyes still on the huge headlights, the outjutting bumper, the chrome and the polished red paint.

"I bought it in Dotham," he said. "It's a Model-A Essex with a V-8 engine and it will do eighty—that's miles per hour—on the Dotham Raceway. Would you like to drive it?"

"I'm dying to," she said. "But you must meet the Emersons. Mr. Emerson just shocked me with some information. It's 'Babe,' not 'Baby' Ruth you remembered from this era."

"No," he said, as they walked toward the house. "It was Baby

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Ruth, a candy bar. I found one at the station. In my previous life it was my favorite candy."

He was not smiling as he spoke. They mounted the steps to where the Emersons waited.

"How do you like Dotham?" was Mr. Emerson's first question.

"Greatest little town in the world," Amal answered with an enthusiasm dismaying to Lyn. "I hadn't been here an hour before I met the mayor and bought an automobile from him. How would y'all like to go for a ride?"

He had intentionally used the plural noun correctly—his invitation was directed to Mrs. Emerson.

"We'd simply love it," she answered, thinking: *He's one of us—and so pleasantly exuberant after the girl.*

He was exuberant, Lyn admitted. Too much so, in fact. It was a facet of his personality she had not observed before and was probably the overcompensation of a shy person among strangers, but Lyn did not care for Mrs. Emerson's invidious comparison. The sanctimonious, penny-pinching landlady was no whirling dervish herself.

"Of course, I'd rather you not drive over twenty with mother in the car," Mr. Emerson warned needlessly.

"Don't let it bother your frosty pow, Mr. Emerson." Amal waved away the older man's fears with a confident hand. "I'm a careful driver. I keep telling myself that the life I save may be my great-great-grandmother's."

Amal's remark skirted close to taboo areas, but Emerson grinned. "I can see you've visited Johnny Reb's place."

Emerson thought: *And nipped his bootleg moonshine.*

Lyn read the thought clearly, yet could not understand it. Amal, who, she had to admit, was much farther advanced in the dialect than she, seemed to catch connotations in Emerson's remark which she missed.

"Yes, sir! And I mean to tell you, old Johnny and me get along right nice."

Suddenly Amal's attention swirled to Lyn. Placing an avuncular arm over her shoulder, he drew her to him in an act of masculine bravado obviously adopted to camouflage his shyness. He had even bolstered his ego with an extremely pungent after-shave lotion.

"Honey, we just got to take in *The Red-Headed Woman* tonight. The boys at the pool hall tell me the lovemaking in it is something fierce and that Jean Harlow's really got 'it' "

"What's 'it?' " Lyn asked.

Amal slapped his brow in mock anguish. "Honey, they didn't teach you a thang at doctoring school!"

The Emersons laughed at what must have been an inside joke and Lyn asked, "You seem to have got-

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ten around a lot—when did you get here?"

"Early this morning. I'd heard tell there was hard times in Alabama so I thought I'd come early and get a little federal money in circulation. So I bought a car, because I wasn't about to see you stuck out in the country with nothing to do but feed the pigs." He squeezed her closer. "I knew that little ole girl of mine wouldn't take kindly to toting slops."

His rodomontade was to calm his unease in the presence of strangers, but despite her awareness of his defense mechanism Lyn had never felt so disgustingly dependent on anyone before—or enjoyed the feeling so much.

AMAL seemed born to this time and place. During their first weekend he played on the Dotham baseball team and decided to extend his stay an extra week to enter his Essex in a stock-car race on the dirt track south of Dotham. Before their first week was half over he became a local legend—somewhere between Diamond Jim Brady and John L. Sullivan—when he fought a boy at Johnny Reb's, then paid the boy's doctor bills. Among his peers Amal was reckless, quick-tempered and quite popular. Alone with Lyn he was setting no new track records as a lady's man.

They joined the Baptist Young People's Union at the urging of the ice-cream parlor set, which was also the ball-ground, dirt-track and juke-joint set and—in conversations with other girls about their boy friends, so circumspect and mindful of something called "the purity of Southern womanhood" in public—Lyn learned that even by Dotham standards Amal was a slow courter. He should have kissed her good night after their third date. After their fourth he had not offered to shake hands. When the Emersons blew out the lights Amal told her goodbye and moved out fast. From his first week's progress Lyn estimated that they would reach the mill pond by the beginning of the twenty-second century.

Still, drawn by Amal's enthusiasms, she was growing accustomed to hard beds and beginning to like the glow of kerosene lamps. He bought her a gramaphone record of someone named Pressley, accompanied by Bix Beiderbecke on the guitar, singing *Heartbreak Hotel*. It became "their song," though more hers than his. His favorite sound was the roar of automobiles on the dirt track.

Through physical labor—sweeping her room, helping Dilsey do the dishes, driving Amal's car without power steering—Lyn grew more conscious of her body. The girls at the Baptist Young People's Union made her aware of her body's lures. They taught her how to throw her pelvis slightly forward as a "come-hither" signal when she

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talked to a boy and how to give her date a thigh brush when she walked beside him, but she could not give Amal a thigh brush. Unlike his companions Amal kept his distance from her on the promenade from the picture show to the ice-cream parlor. When Lyn moved closer Amal crowded the curb—and self-respect prevented her from forcing him to walk in the gutter.

His theory of Epicurean restraint was working, she could tell from the glitter in his eyes and his animation of manner around her. Unfortunately the theory worked two ways. The cat was on the tin roof and the sun was rising, but the cat with the most sensitive paws was the pussy.

On the Wednesday that marked the beginning of their second week in Dotham, Amal yielded to the pressures of his peer group enough to link arms with her in their stroll from the Empire. As a reward for his valor Lyn gave him a rolling thigh brush. On Thursday he lingered at the Emerson's after lights-out and took her out to the porch, but only to discuss in privacy a subject taboo to the period. He was beginning to take readings from the stress gauges he had attached to subterranean fault lines and, standing beside her, he gave her an account of "My Day in the Moholes."

Stirred by his maleness in the darkness she went with him to his auto, parked beyond the hedge, and when he took her hand to shake it in farewell she reached up on pure impulse and kissed him lightly. Instead of following up her gesture, he turned to get into his car, but he didn't open the door to get in. He vaulted over the door.

Pondering this strange love traffic, she ambled back to the dark house. His nature was urging him to caress her, she sensed, but the barriers in his mind were too strong for his energies to crumble, his impetuosity to vault. Still, this shy lad of the twentieth century was also an adroit Cal Tech student of the twenty-first. He should either eat or get off the banquet stool.

On the next night they again made it to the front porch and she made it to the swing—to sit alone and listen while he read her poetry from a book he held in one hand and by a candle he held in the other. The first ballad Amal breathed in the direction of her eyebrow was *Gunga Din.*

She was tempted to suggest he get a bell to go with his book and candle, but a lyre would have been more appropriate. As a displaced minnesinger, his courting methods antedated the 1930s by four hundred years. Turning him into a modern lover would require psychiatric help, not psychological counseling.

INTO her second week at the village, Lyn found that the boxy-Baroque architecture of

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Dotham had grown more pleasing to her than the plastic uniformity of Los Angeles. During her three working days each week the city was becoming attractive only as a place where she could take a shower without heating her own water. Moreover, her constant face-to-face confrontations in Dotham were creating in her a lively interest in people.

Mrs. Emerson had a passion for lurid confession magazines which she indulged in secret because of her husband's disapproval. Made aware of her landlady's secret, Lyn delighted in smuggling the quaint magazines into the house. Since the romances were concealed in her room, Lyn read them to inform herself more fully on the ethos of the period and found herself hooked on the sorrowful tales of girls who had sinned. But Amal's timidity made it difficult for Lyn to identify with the fallen heroines in the stories.

Amal kissed her on their second Friday. An overly long poem he read to her on the porch had caused them to exceed their sparking time. As they stood on the porch bidding each other good night Mr. Emerson, who allowed no grace period, rapped loudly on the front bedroom window. In response to the urgency of the sound Amal leaned down and kissed her. His lips touched hers with a butterfly flutter and were quickly withdrawn. Though delivered under duress—the kiss was indeed delivered.

His hands were touching her accidentally more often now—and so far from the conventional areas of accidental contact that Lyn began to fend him off. That nebulous concept, "the purity of Southern womanhood" and the warnings against the pitfalls of love she found in the confession magazines were beginning to influence her thinking. She and Amal visited the mill pond together—but at high noon.

She was reevaluating the attitudes she had brought with her to Dotham and in retrospect they were horrifying. She had come thinking like a Jezebel. In her was dawning a resolution to behave like the gentlewoman she was and not some brazen hussy.

As Amal learned to advance—Lyn retreated.

On the second Sunday he embraced her when he kissed her good night and even tried to nuzzle her neck. She pushed him away.

Though smiling, he half-complained, "Had we but worlds enough and time, your coyness, lady, were no crime. But this is our last week."

"I'm not being coy, Amal. Now you go home like a good boy and sleep off this wild outburst of passion. You hear?"

Though lightly and in ironic jest, Lyn spoke the truth. Her repulse of Amal's first genuine attempt to establish a male-female relationship sprang from motives more complex

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than coyness. Perhaps reinforced by his diffidence, his manners, his grace, his shifting and many-shaded moods all enthralled her, but the power and delicacy of his mind, which continued to defy her skills as a reader, awed her. Though a student of science, he possessed a felicity of phrase and gift of metaphor a poet might have envied. His mathematical conceptualizing was so far beyond her that, in kindness, he had scratched the subject from their conversational agenda.

With all this and a green card, too, in Amal she sensed a Pan capable of piping her into glades she feared to enter lest she be lost as a female adjunct to a very dominant male who might enchant her and vanish forever, leaving her to wander the empty meadows of life where no birds sang. She wanted no part of a love affair with this marvelous boy, she decided, and resolved never to yield to his blandishments—if he should ever choose to blandish.

After all, they weren't truly compatible, she told herself, referring to the one area where their knowledge and intellects approached parity: her tastes ran to love poetry, Amal's to dramatic, classic, epic, lyric, and narrative. The one love poem he enjoyed reciting to her was *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam,* but the only version he knew was in Arabic. His favorite poem was *Invictus* and he managed to hurl his own defiance from the lines:

I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.

In those lines she saw a conflict developing between them. Amal had wanted an old-fashioned girl who would see that twentieth-century decorum was maintained. He had his old-fashioned girl—if he ever got up enough courage to claim her—but an old-fashioned girl never committed herself with a boy until she was master of their fate, his and hers.

As her days with Amal in Dotham dwindled toward the end, Lyn, in her malaise, overlooked a a fact she had previously considered—her bashful Lochinvar from the mid-East was also an adroit Cal Tech technician with a green card and an instinct for twentieth-century decorum. On their last scheduled Saturday in Dotham, Lyn watched her would-be lover hit a home run that won a ball game after he had failed to persuade her to stay another week in the village at his expense to watch him drive in the Dotham 100. There was a victory celebration at Johnny Reb's and Amal drove her home after eleven. And gave her only a chaste, parting kiss.

Lying on her hard mattress, reviewing her stay in Dotham, Lyn sadly admitted that the home-run hitter could not bunt his way to first base on her infield.

On Sunday, after ten-thirty at night, on the banks of the old mill pond, Amal gave her a $3,000 (old

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currency) diamond ring. Suddenly there was a whole new ball game.

IV

ALTHOUGH Lyn had never seriously considered marriage because the mentalities of most men were for her an open and ill-written book, either boring or pornographic, history itself mitigated against the family as a social organization.

In the twenty-first century the population of the globe had peaked into the paradoxically but aptly named "population sink." Overcrowding had triggered a mass psychosis and murder for *lebensraum* had piled the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo, Vienna and the Vatican—particularly the Vatican, where St. Peter's was razed. Seeds of the mass slaughter sprouted from families packed into flats where the sidewalks below were made unsafe by falling bodies, usually those of old and infirm family members and later the young and helpless.

Murder became a family affair, in practice an unpunishable offense because of the crowded courts and overtaxed police and legally because of judicial prejudice—a judge hearing the trial of a mother charged with infanticide might have, that morning, dispatched his mother-in-law. The laws against euthanasia were honored in the breach and such murders were treated as *de facto* family affairs. For a little more than a year domestic strife held nature in a balance of sorts but at a grave detriment to the traditional respect for motherhood and the family.

Nature had made other tentative gestures toward solving the population crisis. By 2030 it was estimated that forty per cent of the population was homosexual, but even the gay turned vicious when crowded six or eight to the room and forced to sleep in shifts. Then, quite suddenly, nature achieved a final solution to the problem. Interfamily violence developed into a lust for violence and the domestic strife overflowed into the streets.

In New York City, at 9:17 on the morning of May 18, 2034, a man from Stamford was turning the corner at Madison to go north on Fifth Avenue when he collided with a youth hurrying south on Fifth. The youth stepped back, apologized, then lunged at the commuter's throat. The man from Stamford, a beginning student of karate, killed him instantly with a neck chop.

Some pedestrians saw only the youth slain and turned to attack the older man, but he had his own partisans among those who had seen him assaulted first. Sides were taken. Brawls erupted east on Madison, north on Fifth, as an unchecked chain-reaction was triggered. Manhattan's human pile blew up.

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Television cameras were rushed to the scene. A morning program for shut-in children engaged in filming the ducks live from Central Park was almost immediately engulfed in televising the fighting. So exuberant and contagious was the violence that children in a Bronx nursing home watching the show began to throw their cereal bowls and spoons at each other. Soon the world was watching via telestar, but the average life of a television crew was only forty-five minutes. After three hours all broadcasting, radio and television, ceased. No telephone calls were taken or sent at the city's switchboards—the operators had hit the streets. Planes and buses entered the city but none came out. A long silence descended over New York. The outside world waited for news and grew strangely restive.

What was happening in New York City?

Later eyewitness reports filled the blanks. Lyn's American history book held a survivor's account which appalled her with its uninvolved detachment:

> After the first frenzy the fury left me. I was no longer fighting to express long-pent frustrations but for a better world. According to my faith, my soul was damned by what I did, but my faith—or fate—no longer mattered. The better world I fought for grew visible to my eyes as I wasted my opponents.

There's a naturalness about a dead body, an inoffensive inertness—nevertheless, we had to clear the arena. No one attacked taxi drivers engaged in removing the litter or even the bulldozer operators digging trenches in the parks. There were no wounded to take care of, for down was out, and no lack of food for the fighting crews after the second hour. The restaurants were all overstocked.

A killing code developed quickly—one selected opponents of one's own age, sex and weight. To do otherwise invited immediate extinction by nearby groups. We were all engaged in a civic effort motivated by the simple slogan: "You are breathing my air. Stop it!"

Of course, a winner might feel momentary triumph—we were fighting for high stakes—and the loser never knew that he lost. My own techniques, though improvised, were highly successful and, being religious, I always remembered to say a little prayer for my opponent. I would feint for her eyes with a pair of scissors in my right hand and slip a stiletto through her rib cage with my left hand when the woman lifted her arms to shield her eyes. You

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see, I was left-handed and a nurse in peace time. My knowledge of anatomy helped.

After it was over, I felt—well, peaceful and purged.

FIVE days after the killing started, a camera truck rolled unmolested along the streets of Manhattan, beaming the scene to the waiting world. Bright-faced women and smiling men waved happily from uncrowded sidewalks. It was spring in Central Park and workmen were already returfing the mass graves. The city's buildings were unmarred. A population of sixteen million had been reduced to four million and the city was alive again.

Experts in mass behavior held television responsible for triggering the destruction on a worldwide scale, not a profound deduction. Fighting broke out in Rio de Janeiro while the peaceful scenes were being shown and death moved with the sun for four circuits of the globe. Few cities were disrupted by the destruction of real property. Only Los Angeles, with its tradition of fire and flamboyance, was burned to the ground and from its ashes rose trees and towers.

Searing itself into human consciousness, the Holocaust changed old concepts of the family. It was recognized that parenthood required an intelligence and capacity for love beyond most men and women. Professional mothers, chosen for their maternal instincts, affectionate natures and pelvic capacities, provided wombs for the fertilized ova of women unwilling to bear children and provided care and training for the proxy children until school age.

Marriage was usually based on mutual interests such as that of the Emersons in literary research. Romantic love was generally regarded as too evanescent to form the basis of a marriage, although psychologists had case histories of "love" marriages which had been the source of abiding contentment. In her knowledge of such case histories, Lyn could not accept her own arguments about her incompatibility with Amal. So when Amal, on Sunday night, came to a dinner at the Emerson's which Dilsey sadly referred to as "the last supper," Lyn hoped his preoccupation and moodiness reflected grief over her departure or, at least, remorse over his failure as a lover.

Shortly after nine the old folks excused themselves. Amal had less than an hour's courting time in the parlor plus an hour on the porch. Lyn knew his situation was hopeless. He would never be able to sweep her off her feet in less than two hours, even if he could summon and focus on her that fiery impetuosity which endeared him to others.

Obviously he was in no mood for impetuosity. For long minutes they sat in morose silence, holding hands

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as if huddling against the chill of their farewell. Finally he said, half in apology and half reproachfully, "Maybe I needed more guidance from you, Lyn?"

"Columbus had no navigator," she reminded him. "When you're the captain, you con the ship."

"Your mind was my Sargasso Sea," he said.

If she remembered correctly, the Sargasso Sea was an area where ancient sailing ships were entangled in seaweed, and she bridled at the comparison. "I didn't foul your anchor—Captain. All you needed was a little gumption."

"Or a more cooperative crew."

"You asked for an old-fashioned girl. You got one."

"Complete with inhibitions," he agreed.

"Are you accusing me of timidity?"

"Aren't you timid?"

"Of course not."

"Then I'm calling your bluff," he said. "A full moon has risen and the mill pond, they tell me, is beautiful by moonlight. Are you game to go a-roving so late at night?"

"Put out the lamp, boy!"

Even in simple procedures he rarely used conventional methods. As she waited at the door he went to the lamp, but he didn't stoop to blow the flame from the wick. Standing, he held a magazine over the chimney until the lamp flickered out and then came to her in the doorway.

THEY walked into the moonlight, across the yard, through the hedge, and crossed the road to follow the path through the woods. Walking beside her, he guided her with a light touch on the arm. Leaf-filtered moonlight flecked the ground under the trees.

When he spoke his voice sounded introspective. "Lyn, do you think there can be an affinity between a man and woman deeper than sexual attraction?"

"Of course. Romantic love is clinically recognized."

"I've always been dubious of the word 'love,' " he said.

"It has been too often profaned for me to profane it."

His sentence sounded familiar.

"I've read *The Lives of the Saints,*" she snapped, hoping he had quoted Saint Francis.

"The word 'love' is like a coin," he continued. "It can be new-minted of gold or skilfully counterfeited. I've bit my own coin, rung it, given it the acid test, but coming from a sex-segregated society, lacking the chance for commingling that you've had, I feel—"

"Whoa, there!" She spun him in his tracks to face her. "Don't accuse me of harlotry. I'll have you know that technically I'm a virgin—in Dotham or out."

"I didn't mean—" he started to say. Then, dazedly: "As beautiful as you are? As physically sound?"

"And as fast on my feet. I told you I was a mind-reader. When

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clammy thoughts start clutching, the lily of romance comes ungilded fast. Now, you were saying?"

She turned him back down the path, hoping her vehemence had diverted his mind from her use of the word "technically."

He took her hand and said, "I was just trying to tell you that I love you."

She couldn't answer him or squeeze his hand to show she approved or reciprocated his affections, but he had not asked a question. He had merely made a statement with all the ardor of a bookkeeper announcing, *Miss Oberlin, your books are balanced.*

She had not imagined it would be like this at all, the two of them walking side by side through the woods. But how had she imagined it? His words cresting on some wave of passion in a pillowed room with soft lights, wine and background music? But why had her mouth grown suddenly dry and why this urge to weep?

They walked on in silence. He had said all he could say and she had to wait for her mouth to resume salivation and free her tongue.

Finally she said, "I hadn't thought anything could be so commonplace, so ordinary, so beautiful—"

Her voice trailed into silence as they broke from the woods onto the banks of the pond. The moon had cleared the trees on the opposite shore and glittered now on the water. He guided her toward the dam and mill house. She thought, *My heart is like a singing bird that nestles on a halcyon shoot.*

"Amal, what's a halcyon shoot?"

"An unwavering bough."

A FEW yards north of the mill house rose a grassy hummock. Amal led her there, spread his coat on the dew-wet grass and they sat down. He sprawled beside her, lounging back on one elbow, his face turned to her.

"You know too little about me," he said. "I shouldn't speak, but I can't let you go away thinking you've failed. Besides, I don't want you to leave me."

He paused for a moment, groping for words.

"There's only one first love for a man, just as there's only one Versailles with its Hall of Mirrors. A man can enter Versailles for the first time only once. Later he may covet castles in Spain or live in castles on the Rhine, but they're all measured by his memories of Versailles. You're my Hall of Mirrors."

Again he fell silent and again she felt an inexplicable urge to weep. Sensing her turmoil, he waited, not touching her.

Finally he asked, "How do you feel about it?"

"Like a parachutist taking her first jump. But I was foretold this

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on the night I first met you. . . Oh, hush up, Amal! I'm trying to keep from crying."

He said nothing.

She managed to hold back her tears, but she could not look at him as she said, "I love you, too, Amal."

Her own words sounded even more prosaic to her than his had.

Amal began to thrash around beside her in a manner that drew her startled gaze. He was patting his thighs and feeling behind him as if practicing on himself before starting on her.

His unorthodox way of doing things became even more bizarre when he said, "I may have to ask you to stand up."

Then he sighed relief, "No, here it is. In my shirt pocket. Close your eyes and put out your hand. No, your left hand."

She complied and felt him slide a ring over her third finger. From the confession magazines she knew well the significance of an old-fashioned engagement ring—this symbol of love had been discontinued because it was emblematic of a slave bracelet.

"Open your eyes," he commanded and she obeyed.

One glance at the diamond on her finger assured Lyn she was truly an old-fashioned girl. The stone drew in the moonlight, congealed it and exploded it upward in a brilliance excelling its source. Her feelings, too, congealed around the stone and exploded through her in quanta of joy that shivered her kidneys. In a sudden struggle to keep from wetting herself she lost control of her tear ducts and finally began to cry.

He put a comforting arm around her shoulder, saying, "Darling, it's just a little engagement ring, not the Los Angeles Civic Center."

"Little ring!" She wept harder. "I wouldn't think of swapping it for those monstrous towers."

"I wanted to ask you to marry me, old style, before I gave it to you, but I couldn't bear to hear you say 'No.' Now you won't have to answer. If it's 'No,' just slip off the ring and hand it back."

"What a dirty trick! You know the only way you'll get this back is by cutting my finger off."

"Then your answer's 'Yes?' "

"I haven't heard the question yet, but the answer is: 'Yes, you bet!' "

For the first time in love and tenderness he kissed her then, but his face interfered with her view of the ring until she put her arm around his neck and held him closer, turning the diamond slowly to catch the different angles in the moonlight. Eventually he broke their embrace but held her close as she held the diamond out for him to admire.

"It's the most beautiful ring I've ever seen," she said.

Almost moodily he answered, "Yes, it's beautiful, but I may be luring you with honest trifles to betray you in deeper consequence."

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"Oh, no, Amal. This bride is wearing white."

HE LAUGHED. "I didn't mean it that way. One of the things that I haven't told you is that I'm a stateless person. My parents were killed before I was registered at the creche, so I could be marrying you to acquire citizenship."

"Good. It eliminates the possibility of my becoming the first wife in an Arab's harem."

"I want us to be married here by Brother Barnes," he said. "I belong here. This means we'll have to have a long engagement. I'm running in the Dotham One Hundred next Saturday, so we can't be married for two weeks. You'll have to stay over at my expense."

"As your fiancee, old style, I've a proprietary interest in your green card."

"I didn't want you to think it was a sly trick to hire me a cheering section in the stands when I race."

"I'll be there, waving a white scarf."

"After we're married we can spend our honeymoon in the Dotham Inn, then fly to London or Paris if you wish."

"If you're so stateless, who's financing your green card? Some oil sheik?"

"The United Nations through your State Department. My work's considered valuable and I don't intend to shirk it. Two months from now you may be attaching stress gauges along the Japanese Fault."

"Is that the 'deeper consequence'—a mohole?"

"No. The question mark is me. You may be marrying a schizophrenic. My shadow memories have grown stronger here. When I'm driving on the track someone else is steering."

"Have you remembered any details as accurately as the candy bar?"

"Who knows?" He shrugged uneasily. "Am I wrong—or were the builders of this village wrong when a detail strikes me as false? There was no Model-A Essex, I'm sure. It's weird but I remember an Essex Terrapin—and who would name a highspeed car a Terrapin? I think the V-eight was a Ford, but I drove a Ford Turbine."

"*You* drove?"

Grinning sheepishly, he tapped his brow. "My doppel-ganger drove."

His words drove the diamond from Lyn's mind. These memories could be checked in the archives.

"Do you remember him so vividly that you know what he drove?"

"Not vividly. I'm not even sure of his name. One of those double names, I think. Lee Roy Hatcher. One name I do recall precisely is John C. Calhoun."

"Does it have any connotations, pleasant or unpleasant?"

"It has connotations, all unpleasant." He fell silent for a

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moment, deliberating, then said, "John C. Calhoun killed me."

Shivering, she looked down at her diamond. It seemed suddenly clouded. "Not you. Him. Let's not talk of these things on this night."

"Indeed we shouldn't—on this night," he agreed, laying his head in her lap and stretching out on the grass. "On such a night as this did Dido with a willow in her hand stand on the shore and waft her love to come again to Carthage."

Spontaneously she bent and kissed him. He did not have to read love poetry—he could compose his own.

He caught the nape of her neck and drew her closer, nibbling her earlobe. Astonished at the strength of her delight, she drew back. She had no intentions, right away, of sinning, suffering and repenting.

"Unlax," she said. "We have a million things to talk about. We'll have a formal wedding. Dilsey's sister is a seamstress. She can sew my gown. But we must go. Nice girls aren't found by the mill pond after ten-thirty."

He glanced to her watch and even his knuckles thrilled her as he lifted the locket. "You've been a fallen woman for twenty minutes. Since I've loved you a hundred years, ten more minutes won't hurt."

ACCORDING to calculations Lyn made on Tuesday, Amal could not have loved her in his memory for a hundred years—the maximum time, if her conjectures were correct, was seventy-five years.

Her co-workers were extravagant in their praise of her ring on Monday morning in the office. Though Dr. Kley was profuse with his compliments over her engagement she read disappointment behind his politician's charm. Her announcement probably meant she would be giving him notice. He would never find another secretary with Lyn's charm or her gift for spotting his problems and coming up with suggestions which so often substantiated his own thinking. Lyn agreed with Kley's unspoken thoughts, but was unconcerned. Her biggest job was to screen his incoming calls. Any woman with a pleasant appearance and tact could perform her tasks.

She skipped lunch and her one o'clock class to research John C. Calhoun in the Doheny Library and found the stacks held 326 volumes and monographs devoted exclusively to John C. Calhoun. The index files listed 16,370 cross references to the famous South Carolina statesman. She settled on *A Boy's Life of John C. Calhoun* and quickly discovered he had died fifty years before the automobile had been invented.

Nonetheless, his prominence lent credence to Amal's fugue memory. Hundreds of Southern boys in the twentieth century had probably been named for John C. Calhoun.

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Given the nature of those times—and Amal's nature—Amal's alter ego could have been killed in a fist or knife fight with a John C. Calhoun.

Her next day's research into the history of motor cars opened a new channel to the historical Calhoun.

The librarian at Doheny referred Lyn to the Huntington Archives for a detailed history of autos. On the inter-library telephone she hooked into, and onto, a balding young librarian in the Old Car Archives who was a stock-car racing buff and rattled off such names as Willie Jefferson, Junior Johnson and Daniel Gurney with more ease and enthusiasm than she summoned for Laing, Freud and Fraumilch. She could read his self-cursing over the telephone when his memory slipped and he had to refer to his desk computer.

Amal was precisely right, she found, in "remembering" there had been no Model-A Essex in the 1930s and that the V-8 engine had been most notably represented by a Ford car. The Essex had as its premier model the Essex Terraplane, not Terrapin. The last fact almost authenticated Amal's "memory" for her. No Arabian seismologists would have an image so close to an ancient reality adrift in his subconscious.

Almost fearfully she asked if the files referred to a Lee Roy Hatcher who had driven a Ford Turbine in the 1930s.

"Never," the librarian shook her head. "Turbine stock cars weren't raced until the mid-eighties. Very few were raced at Indy—Indianapolis—before the 1970s. But I can check on Lee Roy Hatcher. One minute."

He fed the name into the computer, checked the readoff, and looked up. "No one by that name raced in the twentieth century."

SHE sighed her relief, but the librarian had been so helpful she hated to leave him with a sigh. Deliberately prolonging the interview, she asked, "Do you have a driver under the name of John C. Calhoun?"

"Let me check," he said, pushing input buttons. "I remember a John C. Calhoun Raceway outside Columbia, South Carolina, open in the middle eighties. It was closed after four meets because it killed too many drivers. . . No, there was no driver named John C. Calhoun."

Forcing a smile, she asked, "Is it possible to find out who was killed on the Calhoun Raceway?"

He puckered his brow.

"Usually a notation was made on the track program. For that I'll have to check the stacks. Excuse me."

In the librarian's absence Lyn forced herself to think calmly. The Cole Porter song which had led them to the 1930s might have been popular into the twenty-first

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century. This whole affair was based on nothing but sheer conjecture anyway. In his association with other drivers in Dotham, Amal might have picked up a reference to the Essex Terraplane unconsciously.

"By golly, I missed it." The librarian walked on-screen, shuffling three papers. "Only three races were held at Calhoun." Sitting down, he continued: "But four drivers died in those three years: James Snead in nineteen eighty-six, Leroy Thatcher in nineteen eighty-seven, Harry Joe Upton and Crazy Carl Williams—there's a name for you—in nineteen eighty-eight."

Hardly hearing his bemused chatter, Lyn was thinking: *Terrapin, Terraplane—Lee Roy Hatcher, Leroy Thatcher...*

"Is there any biographical data on Leroy Thatcher?"

"Only in connection with the race. He spun out on the third turn, thirty-first lap, of the Columbia Five Hundred on June seventh, nineteen eighty-seven. His car was a Ford Turbine."

"Where may I get further information?"

The librarian lost interest visibly. His smile became official. "I suggest, Miss Oberlin, you try the Columbia Public Library newspaper files for June eight, nineteen eighty-seven."

The call and the telefax service put her credit card close to the red area—even for the short annals of Leroy Thatcher taken from the pages of the Columbia *Observer*. The driver's neck had been broken in the crash and he had succumbed instantly. Dead at twenty-one, interred in the Columbia Cryogenic Mortuary by a grieving mother, his only survivor, Leroy Thatcher had followed his father to an early grave, the paper noted. His father, Earl Thatcher, had been killed in a crossing accident while hurrying to the hospital to see his new-born son. Earl Thatcher had also been twenty-one years of age.

She walked from the library with the stiff-legged gait of a soldier who fears to advance and fears even more the shame of deserting his comrades. She had no comrades, no arms, no armor, but the risen hackles on her wrists told her she had found "them." "They" existed, though invisible, unknown.

Was the cryogenics burial a clue? She wondered. No. Medical science could not cure a cold—had it been capable of resurrecting a Lazarus the A.M.A.'s publicity staff would have swamped the media with announcements. Yet what other explanation could there be? Why, otherwise, had Amal been denied a driver's license?

Looking down at her diamond, she found the hard brilliance reassured her of Amal's present reality. She could not tell him what she had discovered. If he thought himself possessed by the spirit of Leroy Thatcher he would drive in

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the Dotham One Hundred on Saturday simply to prove himself master of his fate. If he knew, he would transfer to the 1980s village and attempt to reweave the broken strands of his destiny by rounding the third turn of the thirty-first lap in a Ford Turbine. As long as he did not know, she could guide him from the obvious dangers, protect him, learn from him, through him.

Amal had kept the appointment with "them" that she had failed to keep. Sooner or later those who had granted him the green card would step out of the shadows and demand that he settle accounts. It was a law of politics.

RIDING to Dotham on the subway, Lyn was increasingly grateful for those special talents that had trained her to conceal her emotions from persons whose minds were open to her. Still, Amal presented problems she doubted she could handle. Already she was feeling furtive. At the beginning of a life's relationship with a man she wanted to be honest with above all others she was burdened with secrets she must try to keep from him. Would he sense her inner horror when he caught her wondering if she, in truth, loved a dead man?

When the clank of couplings reminded her the station was approaching, she resolved to put all such wild conjecture behind her in his presence. Then, with a sudden panic, she realized her resolution was petrifyingly illogical—one could not remind oneself not to think of purple cows without thinking of purple cows.

Usually Amal was waiting at the station to drive her home since he rode a shorter distance from Pasadena. Taking a deep breath she entered the waiting room and saw him. He was already dressed for Dotham and seated on a bench. She fixed her face into a smile of eagerness as she neared him, but he did not look up. Scribbling on a writing tablet with a ballpoint pen of the period, he had not noticed her entrance and paid no attention to her presence.

She glanced down. He was writing Arabic symbols across the page, jotting down a phrase, pausing, jotting down another. Deep in concentration he was violating a taboo, almost. It was extremely unlikely that a twentieth century Dothamite would be writing in Arabic. Waiting longer, she grew vexed. His beloved, wearing his ring and wafting his favorite perfume downwind toward him, was standing within three feet of him, completely ignored.

He must be writing a love lyric in his native tongue to translate to her later, she decided, her vexation vanishing. Suddenly she felt an urge to reach out and feel the nape of his neck to check it for scar tissue—or bone calcification. Leroy Thatcher's neck had been broken.

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She whirled and silently fled to the dressing room.

When she approached him the second time, high-heeled shoes clattering, he rose and greeted her with only a smile. "You must have come in while I wasn't looking."

He did not offer her a kiss and she did not insist, saying, "You were writing something in Arabic and I decided not to disturb you."

"It isn't Arabic," he said, steering her toward the door, "although some of the symbols are. I was figuring the inertial force of torque on a curving body."

"What's the value of such figures?"

"Oh, they can be used for anything," he shrugged. "Knowing the speed, weight, center of gravity, and a few other factors, you could figure the speed at which a car would turn a curve without toppling over."

"You're not worried about the race next Saturday?" she asked in sudden alarm.

"Less worried than you, darling. My only worry is that I might not win."

He seemed pleased by her concern as they walked out of the station toward the parking lot and it occurred to her that alarm was natural in the sweetheart of a boy who was racing an automobile.

"I am worried, Amal. You'll be driving with no roll bars on the roadster, no safety belts, no crash helmet, no air pillows, nothing."

"That's the way I like it, with nothing but skill and nerve. If I freeze up I'm a dead man."

She shuddered and momentarily turned her face aside.

"What's wrong, honey?" he asked.

"Someone's walking on my grave," she said. Chill bumps were visible on her forearms.

"How morbid," he said. "Maybe you'd feel safer if you drove. I have some more figuring to do."

"I'd love to drive," she said truthfully.

He was preoccupied and she wanted to be occupied. His preoccupation would make him less attentive and her busyness would make her less likely to reveal variations from her standard behavior—and another variation occurred almost immediately. As she drove around the circle and passed before the Empire Theater, she read a playbill plastered on the front of the building:

COMING SOON
I MARRIED A ZOMBIE

The juxtaposition of the playbill with her secret thoughts brought an involuntary gasp from her.

Amal heard and glanced over. "Forget something?"

"I forgot to call the baker about the wedding cake."

"I've put in the order," he said. "He's baking a seven-layer cake with a bride and groom on top."

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"Seven!" Leroy Thatcher had died on June 7, 1987. "Why seven?"

"Traditional, I guess," he answered without looking up from his jottings. "Seven's a lucky number."

SHE was spooked, she thought. They had been together less than ten minutes. A normally apperceptive Amal would have spotted her jumpiness at least three times and would have started to question her. That he had not spotted it was all to the good. But his inattentiveness was not normal. There was a vagueness about him, a remoteness she didn't like.

"Why do you have to figure forces to get a car around a curve?" she asked. "Wouldn't it be easier to slow down a little?"

"I didn't say I was plotting the turn of an automobile. I said the figures could be used for that purpose."

"What are you using them for?"

"Nothing important, I hope."

"They must be important if they make you forget to kiss me at the station—so tell me about them."

"They're taboo for this period. I'll kiss you twice at the mailbox. Besides, you wouldn't be interested."

"How do you know I wouldn't be interested if you don't tell me what they mean?"

"I hope you never know."

"Are you keeping secrets from me, you renegade Moslem?"

"Backsliding Coptic Southern Baptist Christian," he corrected her. "If a man doesn't have a few secrets, he loses his attraction. I quote a well-known mindreader."

"Well, I still have a few secrets myself," she said.

"Yes—and you've promised to keep them for two weeks."

"You're not only furtive," she snapped. "You're dirty-minded."

"Some mind. Some dirt. Speaking of promises, I know I promised you I'd always report to Dotham promptly after school. You'll be fitting your gown tomorrow. I'd like to stay over at Cal Tech for an hour to program a taboo machine which will not be available till five."

"You know I look forward all day to meeting you at the station."

"And I," he said, "look forward to meeting you. But I'll make it up to you if we miss this once. We'll go picnicking on the sacred knoll by the holy mill pond on Thursday—and I promise to be devoted, attentive and very entertaining."

"Entertaining how?"

"Well, I haven't given much thought to the entertainment," he said. "Maybe we could go skinny-dipping."

"Skinny-dipping in daylight? Never!"

"We'll be going to prayer-meeting Thursday night," he said. "How about Friday night?"

"Friday night for what?"

"Skinny-dipping," he answered.

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"You said not in daylight, which means you must be willing at night."

"Just the two of us?"

"Unless you want to invite Brother Barnes," he said, "as a chaperone."

She thought for a moment. The moon would rise early on Friday. The idea of swimming nude in the moonlight with him sounded exciting—in the ambience of this time and place even daring—and she had visions of his muscles rippling through the water. She was stirred to an immediate twenty-first century affirmative, but she had learned wiles in Dotham.

"If I agree, will you tell me your secret?"

"I may not have a secret. It all depends on these figures." He tapped the writing tablet and added cryptically: "If I have one I'll tell you and we can start praying."

He turned back to his figures, not waiting for her agreement but assuming he had it. She had never seen him concentrating so intensely. When he dropped her by the mailbox, she had to remind him to kiss her goodbye.

DURING the fitting of her gown by Dilsey's sister, Lyn thought of Amal constantly. That night she dreamed he stood beside her before the altar, dressed formally for their marriage, and when she turned to accept the wedding band she found him hoary with cold, rime whitening his hair and liquid oxygen evaporating from his eye sockets.

Awakened by the nightmare, she realized that against all logic she was developing an obsession about Amal and cryogenic burials. Her own sanity was splitting on the shoals of the single question—how could Amal, born to the language of Arabia and growing up in Baghdad, have valid memories of Leroy Thatcher, an American dead almost a century before?

In the morning Amal was still preoccupied during the drive to the station. She rode beside him in silence, concealing her concern for him though inwardly her purple cows were threatening a stampede. If Amal discovered her growing obsession he would abandon her as totally insane and be off without hindrance to the 1980s to challenge his fate.

At the office her absent-mindedness became apparent to Dr. Kley, and his awareness of her state of mind made her decide on a radical course of action. She had to find some answers. Kley had what he called an "important conference at the Civic Center." Lyn knew he was going to the Civic Center but not to the City Hall. A widow in a plush Bunker Hill Leisure World pod was awaiting him with martinis. Timing her request a few seconds before he left, Lyn asked his permission to make a personal long-distance phone call, confessing

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frankly that her credit card was approaching a deficit.

"Sure, Lyn, call London if you wish—on the city."

Kley was generous with his bureaucratic privileges, because he trusted her to justify his personal expenses with the Budget Department. Besides, he hoped to ensnare her in a net of favors, sooner or later, whether she was married or single, and carry her to the Leisure World tower. With the tolerance of a woman who has shared in the secrets of many men, Lyn respected his abilities, his innate kindness, and was amused by his futile hope. Though he was thirty years her senior, Lyn never thought of Dr. Kley as a dirty old man, merely a sexy senior citizen.

Alone in her office, Lyn called the information computer in Columbia, South Carolina, and asked for the Columbia Cryogenic Mortuary. The computer informed her there was no one by that name in Columbia. Without hanging up, Lyn directed the computer to transfer her call to the Columbia Archivist and a woman answered the phone. Introducing herself as the office of the Chairman of the Board of Supervisors, City of Los Angeles, Lyn inquired about the Columbia Cryogenic Mortuary.

Thinking she spoke as one official to another, the archivist was informal and informative.

"Oh, dear. That operation went out of business over fifty years ago. The officer in charge of the perpetual care fund absconded and there was a malfunction in the mortuary's refrigeration unit. Later the building was razed by a mob during the Holocaust because of its symbolic nature."

"What disposition was made of the bodies?"

"Eventually they were cremated. A few that remained in the still-functioning vaults were disposed of to various facilities."

"Do you have the record on the body of Leroy Thatcher?"

"Indeed. We're very careful about such matters in Columbia. One moment. Ah, here it is. Leroy Thatcher's body was transferred to the medical department at Duke University on October third, two thousand twenty-nine. It was cremated six days later in the presence of witnesses and the Certificate of Cremation mailed to us on October eleventh.

Lyn relaxed. Though the mystery of Amal's memory remained, a horror was lifted from her mind. As his wife, she could steer him away from the 1980s village. She would not go swimming in the moonlight with a resurrected corpse. The only ice at their wedding would be in the mint juleps.

V

"PROVE your powers, sibyl," Amal challenged her. "Prophesy something."

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Walking beside him down the path on the way to the picnic, Lyn exulted. She had been aching for a chance to set the skeptic on a three-legged stool. Last night Mr. Emerson's thoughts, as he pretended to read a magazine, had given her today's opportunity.

"I predict that the Emersons will defect to the nineteen-thirties and buy a hamburger stand in Dotham as soon as their study grant expires."

"Maybe," he agreed, knowing she spoke the truth. "But their grants don't expire for a month. We may be in Ankara by then."

"Then call them long-distance," she snapped, vexed because he had not turned to her in open-mouthed admiration.

"Oh, I'll take your word for it," he said.

Amal was an incorrigible confidence keeper, but she had read enough of Mr. Emerson's thoughts to know that the old mill could make Amal admit to her powers. No one had breathed a word to Lyn, but she knew the Arabian millionaire had advanced, interest free, the $220.00 Emerson needed to complete the full payment for Hamburger Heaven, a hamburger stand facing Lee's Square in downtown Dotham.

They broke from the woods onto the margin of the lake. Downstream, within a keen ear's hearing distance of the hillock where they planned to picnic, an old black man sat on the bank fishing.

"Oh, dear! We have company."

"That's Uncle Moses, the handyman at the Culpepper place," Amal said. His voice dropped to a whisper. "Try to read his mind. He's lived here for seventy years."

The old man waved to Amal's shouted greeting. When they neared him Lyn could see the reason for Amal's challenge. The left eye of Uncle Moses was partly covered with a cataract. Either the medical science of the period was unable to cope with cataracts or the old man could not afford the operation.

"Uncle Moses, this is Lyn Oberlin, my fiancee."

The old man started to rise and Lyn said, "Keep your seat, Uncle Moses, we're just passing by."

His cataract interfered with his thought messages, but she could grasp bits and pieces: *Amal's girl seems at ease. . . strongly attracted. . .don't blame him. ...like to whomp it myself. . .*

She turned to Amal and said, "Come, Amal. Our shadows are scaring the fish."

"Never mind, missy. Don't want 'em biting just yet. Ain't got my morning rest out."

As they climbed the rise, Amal said, "Well?"

"He was thinking about Saturday night."

"That doesn't take a mindreader. All they ever think about here is Saturday night." Amal glanced down at the old man. "He belongs

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with the shaved-heads. Fort Tejon would be his true country."

"You mean the skinheads," Lyn corrected him. "Let's not open the basket, yet. I'd like to explore the old mill."

The abandoned mill's flooring was warped, its drive belt laden with dust, its grindstone covered with cobwebs. The place was dark and musty inside. After her eyes grew accustomed to the gloom, Lyn spotted the door she sought in the rear of the building.

"Let's look in the storage shed," she suggested.

As Emerson's thoughts had foretold her, inside the storeroom the floor was smooth. The room sealed with knotty pine and a double bunk had been built in the corner. The floating corner of the upper tier of the bunk was supported by the missing rail from the Emersons' front porch.

"This might be Uncle Moses' hideaway," Amal commented.

"It may be where the Emersons plan to stay until the hot dog stand is supporting them."

"Very clever," Amal said. "You've deduced that from the bannister rail. But how will they get to town and back?"

"Probably in a Model-A Essex," Lyn said, "left to them by the same philanthropist who advanced them two hundred twenty dollars on a two-year loan with no interest. Now, will you grant that I read minds?"

"Why not?" He shrugged. "I've led two lives. Why not admit the woman I love into the brotherhood of freaks?"

A bitterness in his voice alarmed her. They emerged into the sunlight and she noted that Uncle Moses had moved farther upstream and well out of earshot.

"Darling, my talent is only an ability to interpret facial and body movements. Stage magicians have pulled the same tricks."

"So you tell yourself," he snapped, "to keep from admitting the inadmissable. Let's face it, my love. We're both monsters seeking the Frankenstein who created us."

As he bent to the picnic hamper she could tell from his outjutting jaw and a vein swelling above his temple that the boy who had smiled at her the moment before was torn by a fury. She felt an energy swirling around him, encompassing them both, and bent to kiss the nape of his neck. The strange force died.

"Do you like Spam, ma'am?" he asked.

So their picnic in the sunlight was shadowed. The darkness was shot through with clarity when they went skinny-dipping in the moonlight on Friday.

WHEN lovely women stoop to folly, some find sooner than others that men betray, but for all Lyn's abaptability she could barely adjust to her surrender in the

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evening and her betrayal before breakfast.

Standing nude in the bushes ten yards upstream from Amal, she was vaguely disturbed by the scene. The moon hanging low above the line of trees on the eastern shore of the mill pond, the silvery path shining on the water, the lap of wavelets on the bank all contributed to lend to the night an unreal and, she had to admit, fairylike quality.

"Last one in's a bum," Amal shouted from downstream and his body shot from the underbrush to arch into the water with a rippling splash. Lyn dove. California in April was not Florida in July and the icy water brought her sputtering and gasping to the surface to see Amal ten yards into the pond cleaving toward the opposite shore with ease and power that belittled her own proficiency as a swimmer. Using an Australian crawl, she fell into his wake, feeling her blood resume its flow as she swam toward the opposite shore.

He was waiting in the shallows, standing higher out of the water than modesty would permit her to do. He called to her, "You've got a good crawl. How's you back stroke?"

"Quite revealing. I'm onto your tricks, boy."

"Let's go up the shore a ways and race toward the dam," he suggested. "Swimming diagonally will give us a hundred-meter course."

"Give me a handicap," she pleaded. "You undulate through the water like a dolphin. How did you learn to swim so well in a desert?"

"At the Baghdad Y.M. Coptic C.A.," he answered, teeth chattering. "I swam the Hellespont once and almost drowned. I'll give you ten meters head start."

She swam to beat him, keeping her lead for thirty meters. Hearing the swish of his body behind her, she knew she was losing and moved to block his lane. With his powerful stroke he swept around her, beside her, and then she had the worst idea for winning a race she had had all week. She decided to throw him off his stroke with a rolling thigh brush.

Shifting to a side-arm crawl, she swung to brush him just as he made the same maneuver, undulating like a porpoise, facing her. As if touched by a fairy's wand, all her latest doubts of Amal vanished. Harpooned, she might have drowned in three meters of water, from the raptures of the deep, had it not been for Amal's unorthodox way of doing things. Instead of instinctively turning face downward, he rolled on his back, spinning her in the gyre, and swung her aboard him.

Whether towing or pushing, he carried her shoreward with unfettered backstrokes until his heels struck the muck of the shallows. Then his arms went around her. He cantilevered her to the bank and

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bore her, moaning, to the mound to break their Epicurean fast. No stars fell on replicated Alabama that night, but they had traversed ten degrees of arc before Lyn again opened her eyes.

Her first coherent words were, "I'm still wearing white to my wedding."

"Of course, dearest. Since I had to rescue you from drowning this one doesn't count."

"Now what was that secret that had you in such a tizzy?"

"Oh, that. I was concerned about the stress readings on the San Andreas Fault. I came up with equations that proved we should have had a great earthquake fifty years ago. But the answer was as simple and as beautiful as this—"

He cupped her breast in his palm and the casual intimacy of the gesture thrilled her.

"Magnetic attraction," he continued. "Iron in the fault facings is magnetized by the Earth's magnetic field and the facings are virtually clamped together. Twin magnets."

"The field won't change, will it?"

"A little, but not enough. . .to count . . ."

As his sentence began to hesitate he grew reflective. She felt again the beginning swirl of his energies—as if he were the vortex of some psychic maelstrom—and her desire rose to his.

"That's good," she said, "because I've forgotten to count."

"Don't tempt me, Lyn. We've got to save something for the wedding night. I have to hurry home to strike you off a medal for tonight's effort—above and beyond the call of devotion."

Well, he should be tired, she decided, and he had a perfect knack for spontaneous compliments.

AMAL, driving back to the Culpepper place, was acutely alert and self-questioning. At the moment he should have been most keenly aware of the girl and the night, both had drifted away. He had known strange urges before, but never at such an inappropriate time and in such a powerful and counter-motivational manner. His actual world had been shoved aside by an abstract universe and the shift had occurred right after Lyn's question about the Earth's changing magnetic pole.

Her words had triggered mathematical responses which leaped at a consideration he had ignored in his magnetic-bonding theory. Driving faster, he wheeled the car to a halt beside the Culpepper house and even as he entered he was prefiguring equations he had not fed to the Cal Tech computer. Inside, he lighted the table lamp in his bedroom and pulled out his writing pad. His mind held a map of Southern California with its fault fissures drawn like veins from the central aorta, the San Andreas Fault.

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He awakened Lyn and the Emersons before breakfast and violated a place-time taboo by gathering them in the parlor to hear the first true prediction of a great earthquake, illustrated by unintelligible charts drawn crudely on tablet paper. Before she was fully awake Lyn understood the urgency in his manner—strong enough to make him overlook completely her lack of makeup—although she never fully understood the reasons.

At 1:33 P.M., May 5th, 2062, less than two weeks away, the San Andreas Fault in the area of Palmdale would slip. All indications pointed to a great earthquake—still, Amal hedged his prediction.

His theory, as she understood it, held that a temporary fluctuation in the Earth's magnetic field would be caused by a solar eclipse passing too far to the south to be seen from the United States. Aligning the gravitation pull of the Earth and the moon, the eclipse would create what Amal termed "a spring tide in the Earth's magnetic bulge."

Sleepily Lyn asked, "Why haven't all solar eclipses been followed by earthquakes?"

"For various reasons—the tension on the earth's crust, the alignment of the fault lines with the magnetic field, the zigzag of the fault lines. But major quakes have come after eclipses. Mayan legend tells of a day the earth shook and the sky darkened. The same's been said of the day Christ died. We have reason to believe that Julius Caesar was killed shortly before an earthquake-eclipse."

"But what puts Palmdale at the epicenter?"

"There," he said, turning a page in his tablet. She could see a flow of arrows indicating that the magnetic shift paralleled a segment of the fault line near Palmdale. "When the field shifts at this point there'll be no magnetic bonding along the fault line—here. This section will snap and drop like a guillotine. If the fault face doesn't hold at this point—" he pointed to a zag in the fault line near Victorville—"the interface will shift from Palmdale through the Imperial Valley. Most of Southern California and upper Baja will be convulsed. A seven point five would snap some of the modules from the tower stanchions. An eight point five on the Richter Scale has ten times the force of a seven point five. With a quake of any magnitude higher than eight point five, the populated part of Southern California would be riding the back of a stampeding elephant."

"What about our little house?" Mrs. Emerson asked.

"Far safer than any tower," Amal assured her. "Still, you'd better get outside at one thirty-three, a week from Wednesday, and stay away from your chimney until the aftershocks subside."

"Then I'll go get breakfast," Mrs. Emerson said.

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Dilsey, Lyn knew, was taking the day off to get ready for a Saturday-night date.

"We've been assured by our government," Lyn said to Amal, "that the towers are earthquake proof."

"Official gobbledegook," he said, raising his arm to demonstrate a point. "The stanchions will stand. They're structural steel. But when they sway—like this—the modules will be forced outward on one side, breaking the shear pins which hold them to the extension beams. The tower sways back, compressing the pods and breaking the shear pins on the opposite side. It sways again. The plastisteel modules have plastic memory. They snap back to their original form. The uppermost single-girder apartment pods will be shot from the tower in the same way a boy expels a watermelon seed from between his thumb and forefinger. Those upper pods at right angles to the line of sway will be shaken from their support beams and fall. All the upper griders will be stripped bare of all but the topmost pod anchored on the tip of the tower—if it's a high-magnitude quake."

"But you're not sure it will be a high-magnitude quake?"

"Not if the fault line holds at Victorville. But the prudent approach is to prepare for a killer quake, evacuate the towers, cut the power on the freeway guide bands and the magnetic rings on the railroads, assemble food, water and medical supplies and theoretically figure on the total destruction and isolation of Los Angeles. We've got to get to Doctor Kley immediately."

THOUGH she could barely comprehend the disaster he envisioned, she knew from experience the problem of obtaining governmental response to a problematical disaster. At least once a week she diverted from Dr. Kley an urgent warning to prepare the city for the end of the world or the Second Coming or both. Amal was not a crackpot but Dr. Kley would not know it. If he acted on Amal's recommendations and the Victorville segment held he would be the laughing stock of the city and his political career would be ruined.

An Arabian could not be expected to understand the complexities of the American political system.

Still dazed by Amal's prediction, Lyn said, "I suppose I could locate Doctor Kley this morning. But the Board of Supervisors will have to rule on your petition which will have to be drawn up by a lawyer and submitted to Doctor Kley."

"How long does this take?"

"Usually a week or ten days, but we can request an emergency hearing. I have a friend at U.S.C., Red Benton, who might draw up the petition over the weekend."

"What is this Board of Supervisors?"

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"An *ad hoc* committee Doctor Kley appoints from the various city departments."

"I'll be a Greek speaking to Romans," Amal said. "What I've been telling you would challenge an expert in Gausian and Reisman mathematics who is also an authority on unified field equations."

"The board provides a math-to-English interpreter, a retired mathematics teacher from Los Angeles City College."

"God help him—and us," Amal exploded. "When is the earliest I can present the petition?"

"I should think Tuesday. Committee appointees have to be notified."

"Too late," Amal groaned.

"The mills of the government grind slowly," Mr. Emerson intoned, "and they grind exceedingly coarse."

"There have to be deliberations," Lyn explained. "There are procedures to follow. You would have to be checked out, your background verified. Doctor Kley would be risking his career if he attempted to railroad a matter of this nature through the committee."

"The only authority who could possibly interest Doctor Kley is Doctor Reynolds, the head of the seismology department at Cal Tech. Once he gives Kley my credentials the hearing should be granted in a hurry."

"But what about today's auto race?"

"Lyn, the time for fun and games is over. This earthquake is no staged spectacular. Real people will die real deaths."

Later she realized it was Amal's casual reference to spectaculars which gave her the idea for saving the lives of Angelenos, but at the moment she was shaken by his reference to fun and games.

"Do you also consider our marriage as nothing more than fun and games?"

Immediately his tone softened. "Darling, we'll be married—in Dotham—the Saturday after the earthquake. Only a week's delay."

"Breakfast is ready, folks," Mrs. Emerson announced from the hallway. Lyn turned toward the dining room, Amal moving beside her. Someone, she recalled, had once said that all romances ended in tragedy. Her romance with Amal was beginning with one.

SURPRISINGLY, to Lyn, the hearing was granted as quickly as Amal had anticipated. Dr. Kley's teletracer located him in a Bunker Hill Leisure World apartment and though he sounded sleepy he was in a splendid mood. Apparently he called Dr. Reynolds immediately to check Amal's qualifications, for he called Lyn back at her apartment, where she and Amal were waiting, within fifteen minutes. He told her to round up a quorum from the list of twenty-four standby supervisors and set the

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hearing for Monady afternoon.

Still, there was the petition to be written. Lyn telephoned Red Benton and he came down immediately from his pod three floors above. Amal quickly converted the lanky redhead—all one hundred and sixty-six freckled centimeters of him—into a believer, although Red, for reasons Lyn would later come to understand, persisted in referring to "this alleged earthquake."

Red called Hal Carpenter, a graduate journalism major, from the floors below to help Amal prepare his oral petition to the supervisors. Deft, quick-witted, opinionated and a little too cynical for Lyn's tastes, Hal lacked Amal's flair for metaphor, but he had a gift for simple, pungent speech that lent clarity to Amal's concepts.

Between typing Red's petition and calling standby supervisors—she found the necessary six—Lyn received a solid grounding in geophysics, law and communications.

From Amal she learned of earthquake sound waves, shear waves and long waves designated *P, S,* and *L.* Hal Carpenter, planning what he termed an "inhuman interest" news story on the mechanics of earthquakes, promptly dubbed them shake, rattle and roll waves. She learned from Hal that a wire story could be so coded that every student editor would print it even if it meant a "roust by the blukes," archaic slang for an investigation by the bluecoats, or police. From Red Benton she was surprised to find that, under the provisions of the California Law and Order Codes—an addenda to the pre-Holocaust Riot and Civil Turmoil Act—an earthquake prediction was in the same category as that of the bomb threats which had caused such a problem in the heyday of transcontinental air travel.

To anyone as interested in governmental processes as Lyn the conversation in the room was little short of thrilling. She regretted the necessary rattle of her stenotyper as she listened. The customs and traditions of U.S. democracy came alive and the body of laws aimed at student subversives hung like a rich tapestry behind the conversations.

Never before had she been so busily engaged in such meaningful group activity, spiced as it was by the hint of personal risk. From Red she learned that their activities, if pursued without legal sanction, would have opened them all to charges of conspiracy.

They took a break for lunch and Red ordered them to keep their voices low on the basis of some vague provision against spreading earthquake rumors. His warning served only to increase the air of excitement hanging over their table. From these talks, Lyn realized, might issue decrees that would set huge buses rolling to evacuate the population and stanchion cranes to

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lower the uppermost pods to the ground.

When she expressed her vision Hal Carpenter voiced strong doubts.

"The political mind operates in a vacuum. The most we can hope for is to get Amal's prediction legally before the public. When he makes his prediction at the hearing the proceedings will constitute privileged material. If he makes the prediction strong enough the metropolitan media will publish it."

"Oh, Hal," she said. "You're being the cynical journalist. Every citizen is given a fair hearing."

"And then told to blow," Hal said. "Besides, Amal's no citizen."

"All the more reason the supervisors will listen," she rebutted. "He's a stateless neutral with no ax to grind."

"Don't subvert Lyn," Red said to Hal. "We may need her later as a listening post. You've got to relate Amal's oral plea with the solar eclipse—over and over. Afterward every news story about the eclipse will recall his prediction to the public's mind."

So it went, the molding and shaping of a plea and its publicity. Lyn noticed a peculiar phenomenon. Her actual presence had aroused no libidinal currents at the table. She wondered if their concentration or her diamond ring was keeping their thoughts chaste.

An unpleasant note intruded on the end of their break. A television news flash announced a mine disaster near Johannesburg, South Africa. Five thousand miners were known dead. Lyn did not catch the full story—something about a new laser tunneling device which had curved upward to bore in the wrong direction, undermining the main supporting pillars for three galleries above, causing a huge cave-in.

One graphic closeup showed an English-speaking black miner, hollow-eyed from shock, who kept repeating, "Impossible. Impossible. One meter either way and the main stanchions would have held, but he got three of them."

The miner's "he" referred to a young Afrikander laser engineer, inventor of the tunneling device, who had been killed in the cave-in.

ON MONDAY, April 26, 2062, at one P.M., in the presence of witnesses, a plea was entered before a committee of supervisors, City of Los Angeles, at the City Hall, by Amal E. Severn, seismologist, requesting that the city be evacuated by reason of an alleged earthquake, possibly major, on Wednesday, May 5, 2062. Hearing the petitioner in addition to the chairman, Dr. Kley, were Howebrand, representing the department of public spectaculars; Paul, of finance; Washington, of engineering; Hagenbeck, of power; Calvin, of Transport and Jeffers, of police. In official attendance were Dr. Westover Baum, interpreter,

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and Miss Lyn Oberlin, secretary.

In the beginning Amal spoke with ease and clarity. He pinpointed on a map the area of the San Andreas Fault where sensor readings showed greatest stress, explained his magnetic-bonding theory, then grew slightly too technical, Lyn thought, in describing the local change in the Earth's magnetic field created by the core shift during the solar eclipse.

Baum was not called on to interpret. He could not have, Lyn knew. He was still struggling with the bonding theory while Amal discussed the unified field equations which explained the core shift.

Amal placed the epicenter of the earthquake in a stretch of fault two thousand meters below Cal Edison's Palmdale plant tunnel leading from mohole five—the tunnel itself was six thousand meters below the surface. The supervisors listened intently until the question period, at which time Amal was no longer guided by the carefully prepared text of Hal Carpenter and Red Benton.

Hagenbeck asked, "Are the atomic generating plants of the Antelope Valley in danger?"

"Yes, sir. Atomic pile five would be taken out by a six point five. A seven would disrupt the power flow from the entire Apple Valley-Lancaster string."

Ten per cent of the city's power supply might be knocked out, Lyn saw Hagenbeck think. As the audience, mostly newsmen, well knew, there was no danger of an atomic explosion since any disruption of the laser control to the steam generators would cause the gravity-controlled cadmium rods to sink into the piles and dampen all emission.

Calvin, of transportation, asked about the freeways north of the city.

"If the coming temblor's a seven it will shatter the Ridge Route in the Frazier Park-Tejon area. An eight will break all the guide bands north because of the poor quality of their bedding."

Lyn flinched. Calvin had personally let contracts for laying several of the guide bands.

"How can you assert the bedding for the guide bands is of poor quality?" Calvin bored in.

"The specifications call for a non-resilient concrete."

Calvin thanked him. Amal had removed the onus from transportation and placed it on engineering where specifications were drawn.

Amal again impugned the engineering department when asked about the area of greatest danger, the city's towers. "Care was put into the stanchion design, but the plastic memory of the attached apartment modules was overlooked."

Washington had been a child when the towers were erected, but

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Amal's remark still reflected on his department.

"You speak of the 'coming quake,'" the supervisor remarked with some irritation. "Are you making an unqualified prediction?"

"Yes," Amal answered firmly. "The quake will occur at one thirty-three on the afternoon of May fifth, during the apex of the core shift caused by the solar eclipse. For that reason I'm compelled to invite the committee's attention to the feasibility of evacuating all towers and closing all roads and railroads on May fifth."

Kley glanced at his watch and rapped the gavel.

"The committee thanks the petitioner for his zeal and devotion and requests that he submit his exhibits to the committee for in-chamber deliberations. If the public desires to wait, the committee's decision will be forthcoming at two P.M."

In less than fifteen minutes. Kley was herding the committee at a gallop. He had a golfing date with the widow at 2:30, Lyn read in his thoughts, but haste might be to Amal's advantage. The hostilities he had aroused would not have time to harden and the newsmen would not get bored and leave before the decision was announced.

LYN'S receptors picked up little of the committee members' feelings in the chamber. Drowning out all others, Westover Baum's confusion was the strongest emotion in the room. Kley ignored the exhibits and called for the mathematician's opinion.

"I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, the reasoning was quite beyond me, but the boy's imagination should be taken seriously."

Kley thanked him and excused him. Once Baum's signals ceased, Lyn took her seat against the wall to concentrate on the more subdued readings from the committee members.

Kley sat at the head of the table, Amal's charts unread before him. A bowl for holding the black and white balls of acceptance or rejection of the petition was in the center of the table. Recording equipment readied, Lyn had a straight-on view of Washington, Howebrand, and Jeffers, whose faces she could study unobserved.

"Committee members," Kley said, "obviously our young petitioner has too excellent a mathematical imagination to be dismissed. As you know, if I close the roads and evacuate the towers I'll open the city to countless law suits from litigious merchants, salesmen, innkeepers and commuters. If you decide to close the roads and evacuate the towers and offer me as a sacrificial lamb I'll be convinced that you erred on the side of prudence. If you consider the risks great enough to jeopardize the city's budget, so vote, and I'll issue your orders. Now, let's all meditate

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for five minutes and then vote."

Delivered with sincerity and a smile, Kley's instructions were both pro and con the petition, Lyn recognized. He was throwing the decision to the committee. Lyn focused her receptors on the faces she could see.

Her thin lips pursed in concentration, Supervisor Washington resembled a Nubian chief more than a black woman. Lyn read: *Sell my Cal Ed stock and reinvest in Forest Lawn.* Buy ticket to Bahamas—blackball whitey.

The equine face of Jeffers, *pro tempore* supervisor and permanent chief of police, was concerned with administrative problems: *Tactical riot squads training for weeks... find out what they've learned... need crowds for riots...fishing trip the fifth...other side Catalina...tidal wave...*

Lyn focused her attention on Howebrand, of spectaculars. Wearing dark glasses, plaid coat, his long hair dyed black, the producer was in the right area but the wrong era as his thoughts revealed: *Pan shots from whirlybirds over the towers. . . ground cameras at fault lines for auto crashes. . .be airborne by noon. . .splice the footage into a Howebrand production.*

When Kley rapped his gavel and the balls dropped from clenched fists into the bowl, Lyn's three-member survey had convinced her that the most Amal could hope for was a split vote to be decided by the chairman. Kley drew the bowl toward him, glanced in and dropped a white ball.

Lyn knew by the chairman's open vote that Amal's petition was denied. If the quake struck and the modules fell, Lyn's record would show that the chairman had voted to evacuate and he could stand on his record. If only a minor temblor struck, the vote would be forgotten.

"Lyn," Kley said, "would you announce that the petition has been denied by a vote of four blacks to three whites. Henceforward any earthquake prediction has the status of a rumor deleterious to public serenity." He turned and smiled for her alone, "Of course the prediction will be printed in the newspapers as a part of the hearing proceedings, so your man's purposes will have been served."

Kley was the consummate politician, she realized, as she returned to the hearing room to make the announcement. Everyone had gotten a bit of what they wanted in a typical compromise by the Great Pacificator.

VI

TO herself Lyn could justify the decision of the committee—Amal's prediction had been equivocal and she herself half-believed his phobia was making him overreact. There had been few great earthquakes in California, the

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last in 1906. Amal, she felt, might be yielding to the Arab's tendency to believe his own metaphor—and no one had demonstrated that his abstruse mathematics were more.

Yet she could not justify the vote of the three supervisors whose minds she had read as anything other than disgraceful. Whatever their official opinions, they had been personally convinced by Amal's words, at least enough to provide for their own safety, yet they had banned his prediction from the public.

At the meeting in the city hall's automat, where she, Amal, Red and Hal gathered to hear the 2:30 news bulletin, hold a post mortem on the death of their petition and plan their next step, she kept silent. The fragments of thoughts she had picked up at the deliberations were not true indications of the supervisors' final reasoning processes and to mention those thoughts would involve self-revelations she had trained herself to conceal.

The conversation over coffee was surprisingly free of rancor. Red held that supporting authority from other Cal Tech seismologists might have carried the petition. The city could not finance a mass exodus into the surrounding deserts on the unsupported prediction of a graduate student, but a verification by a committee of seismologists, would put the prediction beyond rumor and into the public domain as a scientific truth. Anyone spreading the rumor thereafter, would not be liable to a conspiracy charge.

"What is this 'conspiracy?' " Amal asked Red.

"Two or more persons conspiring to break a law or breach a city ordinance—such as spreading a rumor deleterious to public serenity."

"How can we spread a rumor without spreading a rumor?"

"By publicity given to a privileged statement," Hal Carpenter said. "Television will help. When the late news editions hit the street the prediction will be spelled out on the front page. From then on, whenever an Angeleno hears, *Solar eclipse*, he'll think, *Earthquake*."

"There's more to it than a prediction," Amal said. "More to it than just walking out of a tower. In fact, if you walk in the wrong direction from the tower you'll be killed by the falling pods. Then there's the matter of water, food and supplies for three days—plus a prayer book."

"Why isn't the truth a defense against rumor?" Lyn asked.

"Truth is a defense against rumor mongering," Red answered. "But conspiracy stands on its own legs. If two conspire to monger a rumor banned by law—and if the rumor proves true—the charge of rumor mongering is dropped but the conspiracy charge still stands."

"What a stupid law," Lyn said.

"It's not stupid at all viewed historically," Red said, sounding

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piqued. "During the population sink, spreading a rumor was the preferred method of starting a race riot. Once the riot started, the rumor was true, but the rumor started the riot. Earthquake predictions were used by land speculators in early California to lower real estate values."

"Treat us to the history some other time, Counselor," Amal snapped. "Right now, what can we legally do to clear the towers on May fifth?"

"Take a stroll in the park," Red said.

"To get a front seat for the mass slaughter?"

Hal turned to Lyn. "QUAKER SHAKES CITY HALL—what do you think of that as a headline to my story?"

"I would think it a religious story," she answered.

Red was still thinking.

"Hal could write a series of articles for the school papers outlining what to do in the event of a killer quake—"

"And bind them into a pamphlet," Lyn inserted.

"How many students read the school newspapers?" Amal asked Hal.

"The latest poll shows thirty-eight per cent. The general public never sees them. However, if I could make the articles interesting enough the metro papers might copy. A student at Miami won a Pulitzer Prize for Journalism with a series of articles on a hurricane, although he wrote them after the event— Here's the news and our opening blast."

They turned to the life-sized screen in a darkened corner of the automat to watch the image of Happy Jack Harrison. Before he spoke they could sense his excitement and his normally high-pitched voice was up an octave as the staccato speech that was his trademark rolled through the room.

HAPPY JACK'S excitement was over an explosion in the University of Madrid's exotic fuels laboratory which had leveled most of the campus and four blocks of flats in the old city nearby. A young chemical engineer, Armando Sietro, had been formulating an ionic propellant for spacecraft when a vat had inexplicably ignited. The death toll, it was estimated, would eventually top 17,000.

Squeezed into the last minute of the broadcast was the simple announcement, "Today at city hall a petition to evacuate the city on May fifth because of an expected earthquake was denied. The latest prediction was made by Armando Severn, a Cal Tech student."

He had confused Amal's name with Armando Sietro's.

"I like that 'latest prediction,' " Red said to Hal. "You journalists are versatile. You can editorialize and get your facts wrong in one sentence."

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"He got rattled," Hal said, "when a natural spectacular hit the news. So there goes our front page story—and my Pulitzer Prize."

A memory in Lyn's mind formed into a suggestion. "Why don't we produce a spectacular about a great earthquake in Los Angeles and put it on the road? It would reach a large audience and no one would realize it was an educational documentary."

"We're not producers." Amal turned to Hal. "Isn't there some way we can reach a mass audience with a written record?"

"In the old days there used to be an underground press that printed all the news not fit to print elsewhere. It reached a tremendous audience."

"Indeed it did," Lyn said, remembering history. "A large audience of sex-oriented perverts, deviates and voluptuaries."

"Which is about eighty per cent of the population," Hal said. "Present company excepted."

"Hold it a minute," Red Benton said. "Lyn's idea of a spectacular is worth thinking about. I know a girl in the cinema department at U.S.C. who has a genius for that sort of thing. If we're careful not to mention the solar eclipse a documentary would stay within the letter of the ban."

"You two talk it over," Amal said. "I want to speak to Hal privately."

He and Hal got up and moved to a table out of earshot of Red and Lyn, who wondered aloud, "Now, what are those two planning?"

"A picnic in the park on May fifth, I assume—and I'm being very careful not to find out. If I knowingly assisted a client in breaking the law I could be disbarred."

His use of the word "client" aroused her suspicions. Amal had retained Red Benton without telling her and now he was speaking to Hal Carpenter in secret. Vexed and suddenly worried, she looked over at their table. Amal's back was to her but Hal's face was plainly visible. She studied Hal's face.

From the widening of his eyes, a slight recoil to his shoulders, she could tell he had been frightened by something Amal had told him. A shift of his eyes to the left indicated a private fear had struck him. His jaw muscles tightened, his shoulders squared and he leaned forward, suddenly resolute, listening intently to Amal.

All the minute clues she read came together in her mind to form the insights which set her apart. Amal had said that possibly a million lives—the figure leaped clearly into her mind—were at stake unless Hal organized an underground press to publicize the prediction. On that possibility, knowing that his journalistic career would be destroyed by a jail sentence, Hal had acceded to Amal's proposal.

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One million lives! Amal had never mentioned such casualties to her. She turned to face Red Benton, smiling to hide her shock, and found him looking at her with amused speculation.

"You were reading their lips. You were so intent your head was cocked in the listening attitude of the blind."

"But Hal said nothing." She smiled, shrugged. "Now who is this wizard you know in the cinema department?"

"Gloria Jaffee."

"Her!"

"Oh, I know she's a beautiful redhead—"

"Out of a bottle."

"But she has talents."

"She's man-hungry."

"That's one of her talents. But don't worry about Amal. He won't even see her. He's an earthquake monomaniac."

She had diverted Red's thoughts from her alleged lip-reading, but Red had diluted her anticipation over an earthquake epic with his choice of producers. Now she would have to work with one eye on Amal who was returning with an obviously subdued and thoughtful Hal Carpenter.

"Here's the plan," Amal said, still standing. "We'll produce *The Fall of Los Angeles* at Cal Tech. Hal will go ahead with his articles for the student papers. In both, we'll keep to the letter of the law. Red, you can ride herd on us, there. Lyn, you get started on a scenario about the psychological effects of earthquakes. Let's go over to Lyn's apartment and round up a production unit. We'll need cinema majors, medical students, engineers, the lot. Working around the clock, we can get the show on the road by Thursday."

There was no doubt about who was in charge of production, Lyn thought as she arose—the commanding general was "Armando" Severn, as Happy Jack Harrison had called him. The commentator's error had been rather logical, it occured to her. There was a vague similarity between "Amal" and "Armando," the young Spanish chemical engineer whose formula had caused the catastrophe in Madrid.

EVERYONE deferred to Amal, but Gloria Jaffee was positively unctuous. She swept in and out of Lyn's apartment as if she owned it, constantly conferring with Amal on minor details. From the way she brushed past him in the crowded rooms or slung her pelvis slightly forward when she talked, Lyn decided that Gloria Jaffee was a misplaced ding-a-ling belle from the 1930s.

Amal was a driver, working them all to what he called "the quintessential nubbin." He seemed to move to prestructured patterns, knowing in advance what problems

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would arise and having already thought out their solutions. He got three hours' sleep on Lyn's sofa, Monday night, generously permitting her an extra half-hour while he showered and shaved.

He also spent Tuesday night on her sofa. Obliquely she realized how odd it was to be virtually living with the man she loved, at times almost sharing the same shower, when all the romance his schedule permitted was a quick kiss as a nightcap and a quicker one to wake her up. As fatigued as Amal kept her, she did not complain.

Despite his nearness he seemed to have a conspiracy afoot which excluded her. When he talked to Red he went alone to Red's apartment. When he had to go to Cal Tech to talk to the grips and cameramen Hal Carpenter always drove him.

On Wednesday evening, three days after its inception, the finally tilted *Los Angeles—the Last Day* was previewed in the Cal Tech dome. In a gesture Lyn hoped was sentimental, Amal reserved the table where she and he had been first introduced by Nils Larsen.

"Why isn't Nils here?" Lyn asked him.

"I didn't invite him," Amal answered in a tone that stopped further questions.

Tonight, in addition to Hal Carpenter, they were companioned by Red Benton who had dropped in Lyn's opinion. Red had cut her name from the list of credits as technical advisor. He had also deleted Amal's name and given Gloria Jaffee top billing as producer. He feared the dramatic documentary might draw a reclassification hearing, he said, and he did not want Lyn or Amal involved. Privately she suspected him of using his position to habeas the corpus of Gloria Jaffee.

THE house lights dimmed. From concealed apertures invisible rays from infrared and ultraviolet cameras activated the rare earth prisms imbedded in the pleasure dome's circular wall and ceiling. Overhead the sky became blue and dotted with clouds. The air grew brisk and pine scented. Around the spectators, birds twittered and behind them rose the white building of Mount Wilson Observatory on whose dining terrace the audience now sat. Below, to the southwest, rose the towers of Los Angeles, golden in the late morning air.

"This is the city, Los Angeles, California," a voice announced. "We live here."

At the very opening, Gloria Jaffee introduced a corny bit of stage business. During pauses in the measured cadence of the voice, the Altadena vortex emitted smoke rings of smog into the high atmosphere, a creaking symbol that Los Angeles still lived.

Fortunately the audience was immediately levitated toward the city,

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but as it floated past the Cal Tech tower there was a rush of air and a blurring of surrounding scenery as the camera zoomed in on the Civic Center. Since the audience sat in the lens of the camera, there were delighted shrieks at "the roller-coaster effect," a completely worn-out cinematic cliche.

The Civic Center towers materialized, circumambient, soaring above an audience now lunching in the Civic Center Mall. The announcer was listing dry statistics about Los Angeles, its population, the gross weight of liquids and solids it consumed daily, its automated subway system, its waste disposal facilities, the air purification system. Against this matter-of-fact tabulation, in a genuinely dramatic contrast Amal must have suggested, a forlorn howl arose from the pet park south of the cafe. The announcer paused. His voice seemed to be listening.

"An animal can hear the *P* waves of an earthquake," the voice said. "The *L* waves are coming."

Pigeons were fluttering from the sidewalk. Sparrows launched themselves from the plastic trees of the mall. The sound of the dogs and the flight of the birds brought an apprehension into the dome so oppressive that the spectators at the tables turned and looked at each other.

A metallic humming became audible, rising above the barking of the dogs into the sound of a million steel guitars vibrating through amplifiers.

"*S* waves are causing the modules to resonate against each other on the stanchions," the voice explained. "The *L* waves are coming. Will the link pins hold the pods to the towers when the stanchions sway? Shall we on the patio outlive this minute?"

The voice projected fear. Its listeners caught and amplified it. In the ambience of the rising panic, Lyn, who knew from the script that the link pins would not hold, bowed her head to pray that the link pins would hold as the first *L* wave struck and the towers swayed.

Her eyes fell on Amal. His face was ashen. His eyes were wild and his hands were gripping the table's edge. Despite his phobia, Amal had come here to challenge his madness. His courage steadied hers. Nearby someone screamed and dove under a table.

The pods above the fifteenth floors, were breaking and teetering outward, snapped from their stanchions.

As the towers rolled upright a second *L* wave struck, whipping the stanchions like saplings in a sudden gust, but these saplings soared four hundred meters into the sky and their leaves were modules weighing six thousand kilos apiece. The snap of the second roll produced the squirting watermelon seeds effect. On the lower levels the pods were thrown outward on gentle arcs.

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From the upper levels, the modules were hurled outward and the sky was filled with pods.

From out of the chaos in the sky, Lyn spotted a huge, pie-slice wedge tumbling toward her, the apex of its triangle pointed directly at her. As she watched the juggernaut hurtle down, logic told her the illusion would fade at the ceiling of the dome, but the pods were not fading into the ceiling. Synchronized holographic extensions of the film captured the images as they struck the ceiling and brought them down.

The pods hit the patio.

She was on her feet, screaming when the hologram materialized around her. Rising, Amal grabbed her, shouting above the din, "Control yourself, Lyn. It's only an illusion."

The illusion did not fade. Amid the grinding roar of shattering steel and crunching concrete, the snap and twang of cracking pods, the recorded screams of the wounded and dying and the real screams from the terror-stricken audience, plastifoam blocks came tumbling from the walls. An odor of powdered concrete was emitted from the scent ducts.

From the stage the severed head of an aged gynodrone shot from a pod and bounced down the aisle, stopping at Lyn's feet. Its gray hair was matted with blood, its eyes bulging. Jerking her gaze from the grisly object, Lyn looked at the stage.

The illusion was shattered.

In the mockup of a split pod from the Leisure World Tower, she saw a tableau bearing unmistakably the imprint of Gloria Jaffee. Others saw it at the same time. The screams of the audience turned to squeals and the squeals to twittering sniggers.

LYN had never been touched by the sexual hubris youth holds toward age. From her mindreading she knew warm winds could blow in December. But the scene in the mockup was a flagrant artistic flaw. Shakespeare used comedy to break tensions, she knew, but she questioned the taste of a "producer" who permitted the realism of a simulated earthquake to be marred by the spectacle of an octogenarian daisy chain.

Also, she questioned the logic of the scene. It was highly unlikely that a group orgy would be in progress in the Leisure World at lunch time, a time when old folks would be thinking of organically grown food.

"This was Los Angeles," the offstage voice intoned. "We lived here. We died in the Civic Center.

"For our survivors, the horror now begins. For them the task to succor the wounded, to dig out the bodies, to preserve their own lives. How will this be done? We have experts to tell you."

As the voice spoke, the offensive scene on the stage drew back into

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the wall. An usher recovered the head from the aisle. The recorded moans died. The images of the stripped towers, the dangling pedestrian walkways, faded into an abstract.

As student actors, in holograms, were introduced onto the stage, the shock of the earthquake simulation lingered. Never before in the history of higher education, Lyn thought, had so many students paid such devoted attention to so many experts. A doctor lectured on first-aid; a laser expert spoke on how to find and operate steel-cutting lasers. A black student from Watts lectured on survival techniques and self-defense. Lyn's own expert, reciting from her now anonymously written script, discussed the psychological effects of earthquakes.

At Lyn's table they discussed the production in low voices and Lyn's complaint about the Leisure World sex scene was voted down.

"It's flakey," Amal admitted, "but it saved you from hysteria."

"But at lunch time—it's unnatural."

"That's the point," Red Benton chimed in. "The scene's an antidote to realism. It snaps you back to make-believe."

"The point is," Lyn contended, "we're training for reality."

She was complaining to closed minds. When the house lights came on and Red suggested they make a public show of complimenting Gloria Jaffee along with everyone else in the audience Lyn excused herself. She had to go to the rest room.

FROM Thursday through Monday *Los Angeles—the Last Day* played to stand-up audiences on the thirty-six campuses of the Greater Los Angeles University Complex. At U.S.C. it outdrew *The Spirit of O. J. Simpson.* At Cal State Watts it exceeded the gate for Genet's *The Blacks*—and when it commanded a larger audience at Loyola than *The Crucifixion* Gloria Jaffee decided to exhibit the spectacular in commercial houses, proceeds to go to the Student Relief Association.

On the afternoon of Thursday, April 29, countercurrents were set in motion against the spectacular, ostensibly arising out of an incident on Thursday morning, when an audience at Cal State Fullerton panicked and a girl's arm was broken in the stampede. Sensing in the incident the forming pattern of a mass tragedy, Dr. John Heywood, the head of Cal Tech's Department of Experimental Genetics and the local director of ambulatory experiment seven, took steps to limit Amal's overkill potential. He did so reluctantly and by a devious method at odds with his public character, and he moved with a sense of urgency.

On his desk lay a bulletin from Kiev.

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Dr. Heywood called his old and beloved creche mother at the U.C.L.A. maternity clinic and expressed his concern over the broken arm at Fullerton. A sensational documentary such as *Los Angeles--the Last Day* was a threat to the health and welfare of the young.

An expert on conditioned reactions, Dr. Heywood was consciously pushing a button. The creche mother, aroused by the danger, promised to call the president of the local chapter of Professional Mothers' Association. So it was that late on Thursday afternoon Lyn received a call from Dr. Kley asking her to set up another emergency hearing, this time to present a cease-and-desist petition against the showing of *Los Angeles—the Last Day*. The petitioners were the powerful Professional Mothers' Association. The petition would be presented by James Osborne, the most successful, flamboyant and overdressed attorney in Los Angeles.

No hint of dismay marred the exuberant vitality of Lyn's voice as she talked with Kley, but she was calculating. So Red Benton had been right—but Red Benton was always right. Familiar with the bureaucratic process, she knew she could delay the hearing until Monday to complete the weekend collegiate circuit of the spectacular, but the public showing would be killed by the petition.

Lyn dialed Amal as soon as Kley hung up. Nils Larsen answered. He was so happy it was her that she hated to cut short his greeting to get Amal to the phone, but it developed that Amal was not in. Nils said he had gone to Angeles Crest to hunt deer.

Here was a puzzling development, she thought, By inference she had gathered that Amal was against the sport of hunting and it seemed to her he had picked an inappropriate time for such activities. She told Nils to have Amal call her as soon as he got in and then she did what he would have done—she called Red Benton.

Red sounded insufferably unperturbed by the news.

"What intrigues me is why Jim Osborne is putting on his battle dress for a minor skirmish. The P.M.A. will pay through the nose for this."

"Perhaps he's doing it out of regard for motherhood."

"Not him. Osborne would overcharge his grandmother and put a lien on her pod. No matter. I think I can take him. He's an over-the-hill legal trickster and I know a few tricks myself."

Red's arrogance was so obnoxious Lyn might have hoped for his failure had not his failure already been a probability so strong it was almost a certainty.

Amal called before she went to dinner. On the screen he looked

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tired and seemed almost indifferent to the petition.

"It will be tragic if we can't get the message to the general public, but that's Red's responsibility. I have other things to do."

"How was the hunting?"

"Not too pleasant. I bagged one deer with a longbow. The stalking was fun but the killing wasn't pleasant."

"Then why kill it?"

"An anthropologist on campus is converting the venison to pemmican. It's an easily carried and nutritious survival food. I'll bring you a three-day supply Saturday. But I will not see you before then."

HEYWOOD had acted from genuine concern for the safety of Los Angeles. On the night of the preview, early morning in Kiev, Russia, Ailya Eugenia Semonovna had completed her epic poem, *Memories of Mother,* and kept her appointment with death. Ailya's appointment had been no quiet rendezvous befitting the end of a poet. In fact, Ailya Eugenia Semenovna had been the worst thing to hit Kiev since Adolph Hitler.

As was her three-fourths brother, Amal, Ailya was enamored of speed, a trait cloned into her forebrain from the tissues of a female Russian astronaut on display in the Kremlin. As was her genetic mother, the English poetess, Ailya was given to strong drink. To throw off her nostalgia for a simpler and more primitive "Mother Russia" of her poem, she put "finis" to the last page and went for a drive, though it was long after midnight.

Ironically a half-empty bottle of vodka, found in the wreckage of her car, was all that survived the crash intact.

At high speed, Ailya rounded a curve on a back-country road in the Padrovski District southwest of Kiev and slammed into a tank truck. The truck was transporting 4,000 liters of liquid cyanide to a pesticide factory in Darnitsa. Its driver was taking the back roads in the early morning to avoid traffic. Struck broadside, the truck was hurled from the road—its seams split and the liquid cyanide poured into a reservoir serving southwest Kiev. Before the wreckage was found 76,000 citizens of Kiev had drunk water from the reservoir and died.

When the death toll taken by a poetess exceeded that of the laser and chemical engineers combined, geneticists concluded that the death wish of the prototypes was no longer a private matter. Possessors of the Thanatos Syndrome were not merely death lovers—regardless of occupation they were artisans of mass slaughter. No longer would the boys in the backroom speak lightly of "the Mayfly factor" or the "cockeyed helix." Now they would call it what it was—the Doomsday Gene.

Amal had to be stopped. It was

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suspected by observers that he was being assisted and protected by students, a group traditionally furtive, clandestine and antisocial. The longer Amal lived, the larger his organization grew, the more dangerous he became. It was felt that somehow he would use the gatherings at the spectaculars as his instrument for mass death or, failing that, an earthquake panic.

So Dr. Heywood decided to speed up the local AE 7's process of self-elimination and called his mother at U.C.L.A.

LYN saw Amal only once over the weekend and then briefly. He dropped by to bring her a packet of pemmican, leaving the student who had driven him below in the car, because he was rushing to an appointment in the Culver Tower. He looked so tired she wanted to chide him for overworking but, knowing he would do as he had to do anyway, she voiced regrets that they could not be together Sunday.

Her remark saddened him.

"How much easier it would be if we were rehearsing for tomorrow's wedding in Dotham. I feel like a kangaroo in a tar pit—the higher I hope the deeper I sink. Well, one more week."

When he embraced her to kiss her goodbye she sensed around him a vast weariness, a longing for surcease, for cessation of effort, for peace and rest. She knew then that he truly would have preferred to be with her in Dotham.

On Sunday she went to church alone and early to get a front pew where she sat and gazed wistfully at the altar, particularly after the preacher began to speak on the value of the Puritan Ethic. Work, diligently pursued, he averred, was the best method of heightening sensation. Slothfulness was leading to wilder and wilder spectaculars such as *Los Angeles—the Last Day*. He had attended a student production and said the show's only socially redeeming feature was a tableau at the climax which reflected the producer's appreciation of Christian fellowship among the aged.

Lyn halved her usual donation to the plate, feeling the preacher was a poor drama critic and a spokesman for the mothers' lobby.

On Monday she found Counselor Osborne to be a much more perceptive critic than the preacher. Osborne branded the Leisure World tableau "a lascivious pandering to the sexual arrogance of the young, a symbolic fatuity in line with the show's other scientific fallacies."

Osborne proved a better drama critic than a petition pleader. To the great glee of the press corps, Red Benton "took" the famed counselor by a trick as devious as any The Glorious One himself had ever pulled in a courtroom.

TO BE CONCLUDED

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PARTHEN

R. A. LAFFERTY

The alien conquest made Earth a paradise—but one still hard to find!

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NEVER had the springtime been so wonderful. Never had business been so good. Never was the World Outlook so bright. And never had the girls been so pretty.

It is true that it was the chilliest spring in decades—sharp, bitter, and eternally foggy—and that the sinuses of Roy Ronsard were in open revolt. It is admitted that bankruptcies were setting records, those of individuals and firms as well as those of nations. It is a fact that the aliens had landed (though their group was not identified) and had published their Declaration that one-half of mankind was hereby obsoleted and the other half would be retained as servants. The omens and portents were black, but the spirits of men were the brightest and happiest ever.

To repeat, never had the girls been so pretty! There was no one who could take exception to that.

Roy Ronsard himself faced bankruptcy and the loss of everything that he had built up. But he faced it in a most happy frame of mind. A Higher Set of Values will do wonders toward erasing such mundane everyday irritations.

There is much to be said in favor of cold, vicious springtimes. They represent weather at its most vital. There is something to be said for exploding sinuses. They indicate, at least, that a man has something in his head. And, if a man is going to be a bankrupt, then let him be a happy bankrupt.

When the girls are as pretty as all that, the rest does not matter.

Let us make you understand just how pretty Eva was! She was a golden girl with hair like honey. Her eyes were blue—or they were green—or they were violet or gold and they held a twinkle that melted a man. The legs of the creature were like Greek poetry and the motion of her hips was something that went out of the world with the old sail ships. Her breastwork had a Gothic upsweep—her neck was passion incarnate and her shoulders were of a glory past describing. In her whole person she was a study of celestial curvatures.

Should you never have heard her voice, the meaning of music has been denied you. Have you not enjoyed her laughter? Then your life remains unrealized.

It is possible that exaggeration has crept into this account? No. That is not possible. All this fits in with the cold appraisal of men like Sam Pinta, Cyril Colbert, Willy Whitecastle, George Goshen, Roy Ronsard himself—and that of a hundred men who had gazed on her in amazement and delight since she came to town. All these men are of sound judgment in this field. And actually she was prettier than they admitted.

Too, Eva Ellery was but one of many. There was Jeannie who brought a sort of pleasant insanity to all who met her. Roberta who was a scarlet dream. Helen—high-

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voltage sunshine. Margaret—the divine clown. And it was high adventure just to meet Hildegarde. A man could go blind from looking at her.

"I can't understand how there can be so many beautiful young women in town this year," said Roy. "It makes the whole world worth while. Can you let me have fifty dollars, Willy? I'm going to see Eva Ellery. When I first met her I thought that she was a hallucination. She's real enough, though. Do you know her?"

"Yes. A most remarkable young woman. She has a small daughter named Angela who really stops the clock. Roy, I have just twenty dollars left in the world and I'll split it with you. As you know, I'm going under, too. I don't know what I'll do after they take my business away from me. It's great to be alive, Roy."

"Wonderful. I hate not having money to spend on Eva, but she's never demanding in that. In fact she's lent me money to smooth out things pertinent to the termination of my business. She's one of the most astute business women I ever knew and has been able to persuade my creditors to go a little easy on me. I won't get out with my shirt. But, as she says, I may get out with my skin."

THERE was a beautiful, cold, mean fog and one remembered that there was a glorious sun (not seen for many days now) somewhere behind it. The world rang with cracked melody and everybody was in love with life.

Everybody except Peggy Ronsard and wives like her who did not understand the higher things. Peggy had now become like a fog with no sun anywhere behind it. Roy realized, as he came home to her for a moment, that she was very drab.

"Well?" Peggy asked with undertones in her voice. Her voice did not have overtones like that of Eva. Only undertones.

"Well what? My—uh—love?" Roy asked.

"The business—what's the latest on it today? What have you come up with?"

"Oh, the business. I didn't bother to go by today. I guess it's lost."

"You are going to lose it without a fight? You used not to be like that. Two weeks ago your auditing firm said that you had all sorts of unrealized assets and that you'd come out of this easily."

"And two weeks later my auditing firm is also taking bankruptcy. Everybody's doing it now."

"There wasn't anything wrong with that auditing firm till that Roberta woman joined it. And there wasn't anything wrong with your company till you started to listen to that Eva creature."

"Is she not beautiful, Peggy?"

Peggy made a noise Roy understood as assent, but he had not been

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understanding his wife well lately.

"And there's another thing," said Peggy dangerously. "You used to have a lot of the old goat in you and that's gone. A wife misses things like that. And your wolfish friends have all changed. Sam Pinta used to climb all over me like I was a trellis—and I couldn't sit down without Willy Whitecastle being on my lap. And Judy Pinta says that Sam has changed so much at home that life just isn't worth living any more. You all used to be such loving men! What's happened to you?"

"Ah—I believe that our minds are now on a higher plane."

"You didn't go for that higher plane jazz till that Eva woman came along. And that double-damned Roberta! But she does have two lovely little girls, I'll admit. And that Margaret, she's the one that's got Cyril Colbert and George Goshen where they're pushovers for anything now. She does have a beautiful daughter, though."

"Have you noticed how many really beautiful women there are in town lately, Peggy?"

"Roy, I hope those aliens get every damned cucumber out of that patch! The monsters are bound to grab all the pretty women first. I hope they're a bunch of sadist alligators and do everything that the law disallows to those doll babies."

"Peggy, I believe that the aliens (and we are told that they are already among us) will be a little more sophisticated than popular ideas anticipate."

"I hope they're a bunch of Jack the Rippers. I believe I could go for Jack today. He'd certainly be a healthy contrast to what presently obtains."

PEGGY had put her tongue on the crux. For the beautiful young women, who seemed to be abundant in town that springtime, had an odd effect on the men who came under their influence. The goats among the men had become lambs and the wolves had turned into puppies.

Jeannie was of such a striking appearance as to make a man almost cry out. But the turmoil that she raised in her gentlemen friends was of a cold sort, for all that the white flames seemed to leap up. She was Artemis herself and the men worshiped her on the higher plane. She was wonderful to look at and to talk to. But who would be so boorish as to touch?

The effect of Eva was similar—and of Roberta and of Helen (who had three little daughters as like her as three golden apples) and of Margaret and of Hildegarde. How could a man not ascend to the higher plane when such wonderful and awesome creatures as these abounded?

But the damage was done when the men carried this higher plane business home to their compara-

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tively colorless wives. The men were no longer the ever-loving husbands that they should have been. The most intimate relations ceased to take place. If continued long this could have an effect on the statistics.

BUT daily affairs sometimes crept into the conversations of even those men who had ascended to the higher plane.

"I was wondering," Roy asked George Goshen, "when our businesses are all gone—who do they go to?"

"Many of us have wondered that," George told him. "They all seem to devolve upon anonymous recipients or upon corporations without apparent personnel. But somebody is gathering in the companies. One theory is that the aliens are doing it."

"The aliens are among us, the authorities say, but nobody has seen them. They publish their program and their progress through intermediaries who honestly do not know the original effectors. The aliens still say that they will make obsolete one-half of mankind and make servants of the other half."

"Jeannie says—did you ever see her pretty little daughters?—that we see the aliens every day and do not recognize them for what they are. She says that likely the invasion of the aliens will have obtained its objective before we realize what that is. What's the news from the rest of the country and the world?"

"The same. All business is going to pot and everybody is happy. On paper, things were never more healthy. There's a lot of new backing from somewhere and all the businesses thrive as soon as they have shuffled off their old owners. The new owners—and nobody can find out who or what they are—must be happy with the way things are going. Still, I do not believe that anybody could be happier or more contented than I am. Can you let me have fifty cents, George? I just remembered that I haven't eaten today. Peggy has gone to work for what used to be my company, but she's a little slow to give me proper spending money. Come to think of it, Peggy has been acting peculiar lately."

"I have only forty cents left in the world, Roy. Take the quarter. My wife has gone to work also, but I guess there will never be any work for us. Did you think we'd ever live to see the NO MALES WANTED signs on every hiring establishment in the country? Oh, well—if you're happy nothing else matters."

"George, there's a humorous note that creeps into much of the world news lately. It seems that ours is not the only city with an unusual number of pretty young ladies this season. They've been reported in Teheran and Lvov, in Madras and Lima and Boston. Everywhere."

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"No! Pretty girls in Boston? You're kidding. This has certainly been an up-side down year when things like that can happen. But did you ever see a more beautiful summertime, Roy?"

"On my life I never did."

The summer had been murky and the sun had not been seen for many months. But it was a beautiful murk. And when one is attuned to inner beauty the outer aspect of things does not matter. The main thing was that everyone was happy.

Oh, there were small misunderstandings. There was a wife—this was reported as happening in Cincinnati, but it may have happened in other places also—who one evening reached out and touched her husband's hand in a form of outmoded affection. Naturally the man withdrew his hand rudely, for it was clear that the wife had not yet ascended to his higher plane. In the morning he went away and did not return.

Many men were drifting away from their homes in those days. Most men, actually. However that old cohabitational arrangement had grown into being, it no longer had anything to recommend it. When one has consorted with the light itself, what can he find in a tallow candle?

★ ★ ★ GALAXY STARS ★ ★ ★

Raphael Aloysius—R.A. for his byline—Lafferty is serially writing the Great American Novel. No joke. Lafferty, quite a historian, considers each of the historical novels he's published but a chapter of the aforementioned project. For instance, *Okla Hannali,* released last year, is the life story (100 years) of an Indian Mingo (great man, not quite chief) of the Cherokee tribe; the novel details the relocation of the Five Nations.

Of course, R.A. Lafferty is best known to the readers of GALAXY as a top-notch spinner of sf yarns, He is a Scorpio by birth, an electrical engineer by trade, a confirmed bachelor by choice and now a full-time writer by retirement. "I read," he tells us, "French, Spanish, Italian and German with fair ease and a dozen or so more tongues with some difficulty." His latest novel *Arrive At Easterwine,* just out from Ballantine, is subtitled the Autobiography of a KTISTEC Machine as Conveyed to R.A. Lafferty. Indeed!

Born in Neola, Iowa in 1914, Lafferty has spent most of his life in Tulsa, Oklahoma. But he survived four and one-half years in Australia, New Guinea, the Dutch East Indies and other exotic points east as a Staff Sgt. in World War II.

As we write this, Lafferty is sitting out the winter with a broken shoulder and cerebrally plotting strange new tales until he can type once more.

R. A. Lafferty

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Most of the men became destitute wanderers and loafers. They were happy with their inner illumination. Every morning the dead ones would be shoveled up by the women on the disposal trucks and carted away. And every one of those men died happy. That's what made it so nice. To anyone who had entered higher understanding death was only an interlude.

IT WAS a beautiful autumn day. Roy Ronsard and Sam Pinta had just completed their fruitless rounds of what used to be called garbage cans but now had more elegant names. They were still hungry, but happily so for it was truly a beautiful autumn.

The snow had come early, it is true, and great numbers of men had perished from it. But if one had a happy life, it was not a requisite for it to be a long life. Men lived little in the world now, dwelling mostly in thought. But sometimes they still talked to each other.

"It says here—" Roy Ronsard began to read a piece of old newspaper that had been used for wrapping bones— "that Professor Eimer, just before he died of malnutrition, gave as his opinion that the aliens among us cannot stand sunlight. He believed it was for this reason that they altered our atmosphere and made ours a gloomy world. Do you believe that, Sam?"

"Hardly. How could anybody call ours a gloomy world? I believe that we are well rid of that damned sun."

"And it says that he believed that one of the weapons of the aliens was their intruding into men a general feeling of euphor— the rest of the paper is torn off."

"Roy, I saw Margaret today. From a distance, of course. Naturally I could not approach such an incandescent creature in my present condition of poverty. But Roy, do you realize how much we owe to those pretty girls? I really believe that we would have known nothing of the higher plane or the inner light if it had not been for them. How could they have been so pretty?"

"Sam, there is one thing about them that always puzzled me."

"Everything about them puzzled me. What do you mean?"

"All of them have daughters, Sam. And none of them have husbands. Why did none of them have husbands? Or sons?"

"Never thought of it. It's been a glorious year, Roy. My only regret is that I will not live to see the winter that will surely be the climax to this radiant autumn. We have had so much—we cannot expect to have everything. Do you not just love deep snow over you?"

"It's like the blanket of heaven, Sam. When the last of us is gone—and it won't be too long now—do you think the girls will remember how much light they brought into our lives?" ★

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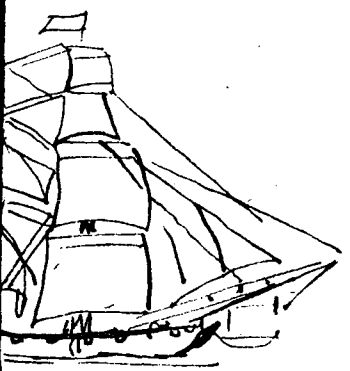
NOVELETTE



ON THE ACCOUNT

If you want to catch lightspeed, try just standing still before it!

A. BERTRAM CHANDLER

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I

COMMODORE GRIMES sat at his desk, looking down at the transcript of a Carlottigram from Port Listowel. *Lord Of The Isles*, one of the lightjammers on the run between the Rim Worlds and the Llanithi Consortium, was overdue. She, using her own Carlotti equipment, had beamed a final message to Port Forlorn before breaking the light barrier. Once the speed of light had been exceeded she was in a weird, private universe of her own—stranger even than the private universes of ships running under the space-time twisting Mannschenn Drive—and unable to communicate with any planetary base or any other ship. Toward the end of her voyage she had made her routine reduction of speed to a sublight velocity and had started to send her ETA to the Carlotti Station on Llanith. She had gotten as far as giving her name and then, according to the Llanithi Carlotti operator on watch, had experienced what seemed to be interference on the band in use. Nothing more had been heard from her. And now she was all of ten days overdue.

The communicator buzzed sharply.

Grimes pressed the button that would admit the incoming call. The screen lit up and on it appeared the fleshy, ruddy face of Admiral Kravitz.

"Ah, Grimes."

The commodore repressed the temptation to counter with, *And whom the hell else did you expect?* Legally speaking the admiral was not his superior officer except when Grimes was called back to active duty with the Rim Worlds Navy, but there would be no sense in antagonizing the man.

"Sir?" Grimes replied curtly.

"This *Lord Of The Isles* business, Grimes?"

"You have a transcript of the signal from Port Listowel, sir?

"Of course. We do have an intelligence branch, you know. What do you make of it?"

"I don't like it. Especially coming right after the vanishing of *Sea Witch* under very similar circumstances."

"What are you doing about it, Grimes?"

"I could ask you the same question, sir."

"We cleaned up the energy-eaters for you, Grimes, and we made a clean sweep. *Rim Culverin* has been maintaining a patrol ever since the conclusion of Operation Rimhunt and has reported no further invasion of our territorial space by those entities." The admiral paused, then went on: "I'm not altogether happy about those lightjammers of yours, Grimes. As you know, we're having some built for the Navy, but I'm beginning to feel like trying to get the program canceled. They aren't safe. Sailing

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ships, indeed, in *this* day and age?"

"They're the only ships we have capable of trading with the Llanithi Consortium."

"At the moment, Grimes, at the moment. But our boffins are working on some other, simpler way of achieving a reversal of atomic charges."

"With what success, sir?" asked Grimes innocently.

Kravitz flushed. "None so far. But give them time, give them time. Meanwhile—"

"Sir?"

"Meanwhile, Grimes, I am recalling you to active duty. As long as the so-called ships of the line are still on our drawing boards we have to maintain an interest in sailing vessels. Furthermore, I have learned from your employers—from Rim Runners—that all further sailings of the lightjammers have been suspended until such time as the mystery of the disappearance of *Lord Of The Isles* and *Sea Witch* has been cleared up. They are agreeable to the requisitioning and commissioning of *Pamir* as an auxiliary cruiser. You will sail in her."

Grimes grinned. "Thank you, sir. But I have to tell you that I'm not qualified in sail."

"*Pamir's* people are—and they all, like yourself, hold reserve commissions. Listowel's a full commander, isn't he? You'll be in overall charge of the ship and the expedition, but he can be your sailing master. We'll be putting aboard regular Navy personnel—gunnery specialists and the like. Satisfied?"

"Gunnery specialists?"

"You never know when weapons are going to come in handy, Grimes. It's better to have them than to be without them."

Grimes had to agree. He knew as well as anybody that the universe was not peaceful and that Man was not its only breaker of peace.

NOT at all reluctantly Grimes handed over his astronautical superintendent's duties to Captain Barsac, one of Rim Runners' senior masters. But it was with a certain degree of reluctance that he left his comfortable home in Port Forlorn for Port Erikson, the lightjammers' terminal. Sonya refused to accompany her husband. She detested cold weather. Port Forlorn's climate was barely tolerable. Only Esquimaux, polar bears or penguins—assuming that the immigration or importation of these from Earth could be arranged—would feel at home at Coldharbor Bay in Lorn's Antarctica.

Pamir was alongside at Port Erikson. The cargo she had brought from Llanith had been discharged but she had not commenced to load for the return voyage. As yet the advance party from the Admiralty Yards was still to arrive, although accommodations — looking like

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black, partially inflated balloons grounded in the snow—had been set up for them.

Grimes, accompanied by Captain Rowse, the Port Erikson harbormaster, went aboard *Pamir*. He was received by Ralph Listowel, the lightjammer's master.

"Glad to have you aboard, sir," said Listowel.

"Glad to be aboard, Commander."

Listowel scowled. "That's right, sir. Rub it in. I suppose you'll be taking over my quarters."

Grimes grinned. "No. You're to be my sailing master—and, as far as I'm concerned, this is still your ship and you're still the master of her. You've quite palatial passenger accommodations. That'll do me."

Listowel's scowl faded from his lean, dark face. "Thank you, sir. But what is going on?"

"Your ship has been requisitioned—and you and your officers have been called up for active duty in the Rim Worlds Navy."

"I know that. But what *is* going on?"

"I was hoping that you'd be able to tell me."

Listowel waved his visitors to seats, took a chair himself. He said, "Let's face it, Commodore. To date the lightjammers have been lucky, fantastically lucky. Even in *Flying Cloud*, where we had to make up the rules as we went along, we all came through in one piece. But sooner or later luck runs out."

"You think that's what happened to *Sea Witch* and *Lord Of The Isles?*"

"There are so many things that could happen. When we're running under sail, building up to a velocity just short of that light, we could hit something—"

"And the flare of the explosion would be seen from Llanith."

"All right, all right. Something could go wrong with the magnetic suspension of the sphere of antiiron—"

"And with matter and anti-matter canceling each other out the burst of released energy would be even more spectacular."

"Yes, Commodore. But what if it happened at trans-light speed? We know very little of conditions outside the ship at that velocity. Would the explosion be witnessed in this universe—or in the next universe but three?"

"Mphm. You have something there, Listowel. Even so, we've two ships missing, one after the other. There's an old saying: Once is happenstance. Twice is coincidence. Three times is enemy action."

"There hasn't been a third time," said Listowel.

"Yet;" pointed out Grimes. "But there's still the apparent jamming of *Lord Of The Isles'* last call to be considered."

BACK in Rowse's office Grimes asked for the manifests of the

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cargoes carried by the two missing ships. It was possible that there had been some item of freight-which, at trans-light speeds and with the reversal of atomic charges, had become chemically or physically unstable with fatal consequences. This was an idea worth considering. But no radioactives had been listed. No industrial chemicals, dangerous or otherwise, had been listed. Mainly the freight carried in each ship had consisted of luxury goods—preserved foodstuffs, liquor, fine textiles and the like. A few shipments of machine tools and some drugs had also been part of the cargoes.

One drug in particular—Antigeriatridine—caught Grimes' attention. The substance was not manufactured on any of the Rim Worlds. It came from Marina, a planet in the Pleiades Sector. It was an extract from the glands of an indigenous sea slug and could not be synthesized. It was fantastically expensive and, on most worlds, was controlled by the state, rationed out only to deserving citizens. It was Marina's main source of income, exported to any planet that could afford to pay for it. In recent years the Llanithi Consortium had been placed on Marina's list of customers. Transhipment for Llanith was made from Lorn.

Grimes' memory carried him back to the long ago days when he had been a newly commissioned ensign in the Federation Survey Service. He had played a part in bringing the pirates who had captured the merchant vessel *Epsilon Sextans* to book. *Epsilon Sextans* had been carrying Antigeriatridine, which had made her a worthwhile prey.

Perhaps Admiral Kravitz' insistence that *Pamir* be armed made sense.

But piracy?

It was not the continued existence of the crime itself that Grimes found hard to comprehend, but rather the actual mechanics of it. Piracy was not unknown along the spaceways, but both predators and victims had always been conventional starships, with inertial drive and Mannschenn Drive and auxiliary rocket power for use in emergencies. Under inertial drive only, maintaining a comfortable 1G acceleration, a ship could build up almost to the speed of light if she took long enough about it. But, as soon as possible, she usually ran under Mannschenn Drive which, in effect, gave her FTL velocity. In these conditions she was untouchable unless the vessel attacking her succeeded in synchronizing her own rate of temporal precession. The captains of warships—and of such vessels as have from time to time sailed on the plundering account—were reasonably competent in the practice of this art.

But it would be impossible for a ship proceeding under inertial drive

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only to match velocities with a lightjammer under sail. And a ship running under Mannschenn Drive would have to return to the normal space-time continuum before her weapons could be brought to bear on a lightjammer—and, once again, the matching of velocities would be impossible.

Hijacking was a form of piracy, of course.

Grimes turned from the missing ships' cargo manifests to their passenger lists. The names meant nothing to him, neither those of Rim Worlds citizens nor of Llanithans. No doubt the police could help him in this respect. Perhaps one or more of those passengers had a criminal record. But the hypothesis made little appeal to him. He just could not imagine the officers of either of the vessels submitting meekly—and he could not imagine any passenger being able to handle a lightjammer. Sail spacemanship was an art rather than a science and the only practioners of the art—Grimes told himself—consisted of the handful of Rim Runners' personnel trained and qualified for lightjammers.

He filled and lit his pipe, looked down at the manifests and passenger lists on the desk. He had a hunch that the manifests meant more than the passenger lists—no more than a hunch, but his hunches were often right. Any ship—even a pirate ship—anywhere in space between Lorn and Llanith and in position to receive the beamed Carlotti transmissions from one planet to the other, would be able to read the routine signals sent immediately after the lift-off of one of the lightjammers. Date and time of departure—passengers carried—a listing of freight aboard. Nothing was encoded. There had never been any need for secrecy until now.

Only the actual mechanics of attack, seizure and boarding puzzled him.

HE CALLED Sonya, told her that she had better come to Port Erikson. "You're the intelligence officer in this family," he said. "This job calls for intelligence." Reluctantly she agreed to join him.

The following morning he stood in the Port Erikson control tower, looking out through the wide windows at the bleak landscape. *Pamir* was alongside at her wharf, a great, dull-gleaming torpedo shape on the dark water. The sleekness of her lines was broken only by the pods that housed her airscrews and their engines. Out on Coldharbor Bay a small tug, *Bustler,* was chuffing busily back and forth, functioning as an icebreaker, keeping the harbor clear of any accumulation of ice heavy enough to impede surface maneuvers. Grimes had decided that *Pamir* must keep to her original schedule, which meant that her conversion to an auxiliary cruiser would be a skimpy one.

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There would be time for the installation of an extra generator and the fitting of two batteries of laser cannon, but no more.

A familiar voice issued from the traffic controller's transceiver. "Pinnace *Firefly* to Port Erikson. Do you read me? Over."

"Loud and clear, *Firefly*. Pass your message. Over."

Grimes went to stand by the traffic control officer. He heard Sonya say, "My ETA Port Erikson oh-nine-four-five hours, your time. Over."

So neither she—nor Admiral Kravitz—had wasted any time. And Sonya was doing her own piloting, which was typical of her.

"I have her on the screen, sir," announced the radar operator.

Grimes went to the window overlooking the Nullarbor Plain, almost featureless under the blanket of snow. It was one of the rare clear days, and on the horizon stood the distant, jagged battlements of the Great Barrens. And was that a tiny, glittering speck in the pale sky? Yes. It expanded rapidly and even in the control tower, through the thick glass of the windows, the irritated snarl of an inertial drive unit operating at maximum capacity was distinctly audible.

"That's her," said Captain Rowse.

"That's her," agreed Grimes. He shrugged into his heavy cloak, put on his cap and went down to the airstrip to meet Sonya.

"THE trouble with you, John," she said, "is that you've read too much of the wrong kind of history. Wooden ships and iron men and all that sort of thing. Pieces of eight. Broadsides of carronades. The Jolly Roger. Oh, there have been space pirates, I admit. But I still get my share of the bumf issued by the Federation Survey Service's intelligence branch—and I can tell you that today there just aren't any pirates. Not that sort of pirate, anyway. There's still the occasional hijacking."

Grimes' prominent ears flushed. He indicated with his hand the passenger lists. He said, "I've asked the Port Forlorn chief of police if any of these people have criminal records. He assures me that none of them have and that everybody aboard *Lord Of The Isles* and *Sea Witch* was a little, innocent woolly lamb—"

"He'd know, wouldn't he?" She herself was flushed, her fine features literally glowing under the glossy auburn hair. "And you have all these bright ideas and drag me out here, where all the brass monkeys are singing falsetto, to join you in this comfortless shack to help you think."

"Not comfortless," said Grimes. The quarters that he had been given were commodious and comfortable enough, although lacking in character. ACCOMMODATION, MARRIED COUPLE, FOR THE USE OF. . .

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"Well, what do you intend doing? Put me in the picture."

"*Pamir* will sail on time, having loaded the cargo that's been booked for her. That will include a shipment of Antigeriatridine. The usual routine signals will be made once she has lifted off. And then we wait to see what happens next."

"We?"

"I suppose you'll be coming along."

"I might as well get a free trip to Llanith out of it."

"All right. You. Me. Ralph Listowel and his officers. The gunnery officer from the Navy who'll be looking after the laser batteries. The two dozen or so marines who'll be traveling as passengers."

"Anybody would think that you were contemplating embarking on a career of piracy yourself."

Grimes laughed. "Why not? After all, one of my ancestors sailed on the account."

"And what happened to him?"

"He was eventually hanged from his own yardarm."

She joined him in his laughter. "Then you'd better be careful. After all, the lightjammers are the only ships that run to masts and yards!"

II

PAMIR was ready for space.

The extra generator had been installed, as had been the batteries of laser cannon. Stores for the voyage and the cargo had been loaded. The passengers were embarked. Grimes and Sonya, together with Major Trent, the marine officer, and Lieutenant Fowler, the gunnery officer, sat with Listowel and his wife, Sandra, in the master's day cabin.

Listowel sipped his coffee rather glumly. He asked Grimes stiffly, "Have I your permission to cast off, sir, at the arranged time?"

"Of course, Listowel. You're the master still. The rest of us are just along for the ride."

"It's a ride I'm looking forward to," put in Fowler enthusiastically. He was a young giant with short-cropped yellow hair, the perpetual schoolboy so common in all the armed services. "It'll give me some time in sail and I'll be all set for our own ships of the line when they come out."

"It's not a free ride we're here for," commented the major sourly.

"More coffee anybody?" asked Sandra cheerfully.

"No thanks," replied Listowel, looking at his watch. "It's time we got the show on the road."

"Can I come up to control, sir?" asked Fowler.

"Of course, Lieutenant. You're welcome on the bridge. And so are you, major."

Grimes and Sonya went along with the others. They had witnessed *Pamir's* departure from the control position before, but it was so unlike

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the liftoff of a conventional spaceship as to remain fascinating. This time there was no need to use the tug, no need for the transverse thrust of the airscrews. The wind, what little there was of it, was northerly, blowing the ship bodily off from the wharf, the brash ice piling up along her lee side but not impeding her. When she was well out into the bay water, ballast was dumped and—the sphere of anti-matter giving her positive buoyancy—she went up like a balloon or a rocket—silently. Within seconds she was driving through the low cloud ceiling and then had broken through into the clear upper air. Fast she rose—and faster—into blackness, while below her Lorn became an opalescent globe hanging in nothingness.

The directional gyroscopes rumbled and whined, rumbled again and then lapsed into silence. She was steadied on course now, with Lorn to one side and the Lorn sun astern. The tiny cluster of stars—the anti-matter suns around which revolved the planets of the Llanithi Consortium—was directly ahead.

The control room guests crowded to the side ports of the bridge, looking aft to watch as Listowel made sail. The stubs of the telescopic masts extended themselves rapidly, sprouting yards as they elongated. The yards and the great sails, spreading to catch the star wind, the royals, the topgallants, the upper topsails and the lower topsails, the main courses. . . The polarized glass of the viewports dimmed the glare of the sun and black against it stood the driving surfaces, filling to the photon gale. The inertialess ship was already scudding before it and the Doppler Log was clicking and flashing like a clock gone mad.

"Roll and go," murmured Listowel.

"Wonderful!" breathed Fowler.

Major Trent only grunted, then said, "I'd better get down to see to my men."

Fowler said, "And I'd better check my cannon."

"We'll not be needing them yet," Grimes told him.

THE ship drove on, steadily accelerating.

It was like the first voyage that Grimes and Sonya had made in *Pamir*—and yet, in some ways, unlike. The atmosphere on board was different, mainly because there were no civilian passengers. Major Trent and his marines were passengers of a sort, of course—there was little that they could do about the ship until such time as their professional services would be required. But Trent maintained his own standards of discipline and there was altogether too much heel-clicking and saluting. And Listowel's officers were all too conscious of their temporary standing

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as commissioned personnel of the Rim Worlds Navy, serving aboard an auxiliary cruiser of that same service. Their captain didn't like it.

He complained to Grimes over a quiet drink in the commodore's quarters: "Damn it all, sir, I'm just a shipmaster and my people are my mates and engineers and all the rest of it. But now I have Mr. bloody Willoughby putting on airs and graces and expecting to be addressed as Lieutenant Commander every time anybody talks to him."

Grimes chuckled. "It doesn't matter. He can call himself what he likes—he's still a very good chief officer."

"Even so—" Then Listowel managed a wry chuckle of his own. "All right. I'll let him and the others have their fun. But it still reminds me of small boys playing at pirates."

"Talking of pirates—" Grimes pulled a key from his pocket and unlocked a drawer of the desk that was part of the cabin's furniture. "I asked you in for a talk as well as a drink. You remember that coded Carlottigram that came through for me on the teletype this morning?" He took a sheet of paper out of the drawer.

"This contains the decode. TOP SECRET—YOUR EYES ONLY. To Be Destroyed By Fire Before Reading—and all the rest of it. When it comes to playing childish games the Admiralty is at least as bad as anybody else. And this message concerns us all in this vessel.

"Navy has an intelligence service, you know. According to Sonya it's not a patch on the intelligence branch of the Federation Survey Service, but its officers do flap their ears and twitch their little pink noses now and again. Unluckily Admiral Kravitz didn't get his paws on their reports concerning the Duchy of Waldegren until after we'd sailed."

"Waldegren?"

"Yes. It seems that our people managed to plant some monitor buoys in the territorial space of the Duchy. I've heard those gadgets described as miracles of miniaturization. See all, hear all, and punch it all back to Port Forlorn on tight-beam Carlotti in one coded parcel before the automatic self-destruction. And that, of course, occurs when anything approaches within ten kilometers.

"Well, there's been something going on around Darnstadt—the fortress planet, so-called. There's a photograph of a lightjammer under sail. There are monitored signals—both Carlotti and NST." He tapped the sheet of paper. "Kravitz sent me translations of some of the messages. 'Clear of atmosphere, making sail.' 'Arrange berthage for prize.' The sort of things you send just after departure and just prior to arrival."

"I don't take any prizes, Commodore."

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"You might yet." Grimes looked at his watch. "Time we went to see Mr. Fowler get a prize for good shooting."

"Didn't you specialize in gunnery yourself, sir, when you were in the Survey Service?"

"At one time, yes. But I never had a practice shoot at point eight the speed of light. This should be interesting."

"Surely no more so than any other practice shoot, Commodore. As far as the target rocket and the ship are concerned, there'll be no great relative velocities. The target will just run parallel to us once it's been launched. If it took evasive action it would drop astern too fast for Fowler to get a shot at it. We're still accelerating, you know."

"Mphm?" Grimes locked away the message. "Let's go to watch the fireworks."

THE watchkeeper—Denby, the second officer—and all off-duty officers were in the control room. Sonya was there, too, as was Sandra. Major Trent was there, accompanied by his sergeant. Wallasey, the third officer, was assisting Lieutenant Fowler. The gunnery officer sat at his fire control console. Young Wallasey was at the smaller set of controls, part of the ship's normal equipment, from which signal and sounding rockets were handled. He was managing to look at least as important as Fowler.

"Let battle commence!" whispered Grimes to Sonya.

Fowler overheard this and scowled. But he said nothing. Commodores, even commodores on the Reserve List, were entitled to their pleasantries at the expense of mere lieutenants.

"Targets in readiness, Mr. Fowler," reported Wallasey.

"Thank you, Mr. Wallasey," replied Fowler stiffly. Then, to Grimes: "Permission to commence practice shoot, sir?"

"This is Captain Listowel's ship, Mr. Fowler," said Grimes.

The young man flushed and repeated his question to Listowel.

"Carry on, Mr. Fowler."

"Fire one," he ordered.

"Fire one," repeated Wallasey.

Grimes, looking aft with the others, saw the gout of blue flame, intensely bright against the black backdrop with its sparse scattering of stars, as the missile was ejected from its launching tube. It fell away from the ship on a slightly divergent course, pulling ahead, but slowly, at first.

"Open the range, Mr. Wallasey," ordered Fowler.

"Range opening. One kilometer. Two. Four. Ten—"

The rocket now was only a bright spark against the darkness.

Fowler worked at his console. Abaft the control room but forward of the masts and sails the quadruple rods of the starboard laser battery turned and wavered like the hunting

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antennae of some huge insect. "Fire—" muttered Fowler to himself. A faint glow showed at the tips of the rods, nothing more. Here there was no air, with its floating dust motes, to be heated to incandescence. Out to starboard the bright spark persisted, neither extinguished nor flaring into sudden explosion.

Fowler muttered something about the calibration of his sights, then ordered, "Close the range."

"Range closing, Mr. Fowler. Ten. Nine. Eight—damn!"

"What's wrong?"

"Burnout." The bright spark had vanished now.

"All right. Fire two."

"Fire two."

The second missile was thrown from its tube.

"Range, Mr. Wallasey?"

"One kilometer. Opening."

"Hold at one kilometer." Then, to himself: "It's right in the sights. I can't miss—"

"But you're doing just that," remarked Grimes.

"But I can't be!" Fowler sounded desperate. "With a single cannon, perhaps. But not with a battery of four. And the sights can't be out."

Grimes grunted thoughtfully. Then: "Tell me, Mr. Fowler, has anybody ever tried to use laser in these conditions before?"

"From a lightjammer, you mean, sir? From a ship traveling at almost the speed of light?"

"Yes."

"You know that this is the first time, sir."

"And it's been an interesting experiment, hasn't it? Oh, I could be wrong, but I have a sort of vision of photons being dispersed like water from the spray nozzle of a hose. Perhaps if the ship were not accelerating the tight, coherent beam would be maintained. . . Is there a physicist in the house?"

"You know there's not," said Sonya sharply.

"Unfortunate, but true. So in these conditions our laser is about as effective as a searchlight and we've nobody to tell us what to do about it."

Fowler was slumped in his seat, a picture of dejection. He was a gunnery officer whose weapons were as lethal as toy pistols. "Cheer up," Grimes told him. "I've a job for you."

"But what is there for me to do, sir? As you've pointed out already, I'm not a physicist."

"But you are a weapons specialist." Grimes turned to Wallasey. "How many rockets have you left?"

"Six, sir."

"Then I suggest that you and Mr. Fowler, assisted by the engineering staff, convert them into weapons."

"What about warheads?"

Grimes sighed heavily. "You'd never have made a living as a cannoneer in the early days of artillery, Mr. Fowler. Those old boys used to cast their own cannon and mix their

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own powder—and they didn't have the ingredients that we have aboard this ship. Ammonium nitrate, for example—one of the chemical fertilizers we use in the hydroponic tanks. We should be able to cook up something packing far more of a wallop than gunpowder."

"You're convinced that we shall need weapons, John?" put in Sonya.

"I'm not convinced of anything. But somebody once said—Cromwell, wasn't it?—'Trust in God, and keep your powder dry.' Furthermore, my dear, this vessel is rated as an auxiliary cruiser, a unit of the Rim Worlds Navy. Our lords and masters of the Admiralty have, in their wisdom, equipped her with weaponry. We have discovered that this weaponry is useless. So—we improvise."

"I'm surprised," she said, "that you don't follow in the footsteps of your piratical ancestor and fit *Pamir* out with a couple of broadsides of muzzle-loading cannon."

A slow smile spread over Grimes' rugges features. "Why not?" he murmured happily. "Why not?"

ALL deep space ships carry a biochemist. In large passenger vessels and warships he is a departmental head, but usually he is one of the officers who has been put through a crash course and looks after the life-support systems in addition to his other duties. *Pamir's* biochemist was Sandra Listowel, who was also purser and catering officer. Even a fulltime, fully qualified biochemist is not an industrial chemist. Sandra most certainly was not. Nonetheless, she succeeded—losing her eyebrows and a little more than half of her blond hair in the process—in brewing up a batch of what Grimes referred to as sort-of-kind-of amatol. After all, cooking oil is not toluene. Lieutenant Fowler, given the freedom of the engineer's workshop, was told to produce a half-dozen impact fuses. He was a good worker and not unintelligent but sadly lacking, Grimes concluded, in initiative. He was a good gunnery officer only when he had all the resources of a naval arsenal behind him.

Grimes, however, loved improvising. Many years ago, when he had been Federation Survey Service lieutenant, commanding the courier *Adder*, he had made some missiles, using large plastic bottles as the casings and black powder as the propellant. After a browse through the chemical fertilizers in the "farm's" storerooms he decided that he had the necessary ingredients for more black powder. He wanted something relatively slow-burning for the weapons he had in mind.

He had seen *Pamir's* manifest of cargo on the completion of loading. One item was a consignment of

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metal piping with a bore of 100 millimeters. Fortunately this was easily accessible in the hold. It was backbreaking work to lug the heavy sections out of their stowage and to the ship's workshop, but Major Trent's marines were able to accomplish this without too much grumbling. The pipe sections were cut to size, each two and a half meters in length. One end of each of the tubes was sealed with a heavy, welded flange. The crude cannon, eight of them, were beginning to take shape.

There was no time to introduce too many refinements. *Pamir* had broken through the light barrier, was well away on the second leg of her voyage. It was when she decelerated, to complete the passage to Llanith under sail, that the pirate would strike. This was a probability if not a certainty. The evidence indicated that this was what had happened to *Lord of the Isles* and to *Sea Witch*.

Grimes discussed the prospect with Listowel, Willoughby, Major Trent and Sonya. He said, "Let's face it. The principles of our lightjammers aren't secret. We're the only people who have had such ships simply because we're the only people with inhabited anti-matter systems in our sector of space. But there have been articles a-plenty in both scientific and shipping journals. And the Waldegrenese can read."

"Waldegren?" asked Trent.

"Yes. Waldegren. The Duchy has a bad record of harboring pirates." He spread a chart on Listowel's desk. "Now, just suppose that Waldegren is monitoring our traffic with Llanith on the Carlotti bands. Oh, I know that the beam between our two systems doesn't pass near any of the worlds of the Duchy—but a small relay station, possibly fully automated, could have been planted anywhere along the line of sight. *If* we knew just where to look for it we could find it. Mphm. Well, one of our lightjammers lifts off from Lorn. The routine message is sent. ETA and all the rest of it. Cargo such and such, consigned to so and so. Then the pirate—a lightjammer, of course—lifts off from Darnstadt. . . So far I've told only two people of the contents of the signal I received from Admiral Kravitz—Captain Listowel, of course, and Sonya. She helped with the decoding. But it all ties in. There has been lightjammer activity in the Duchy—and what would Waldegren want lightjammers for?"

"Piracy," said Listowel.

"Still, we must be careful. We aren't at war with Waldegren. The evidence indicates, however, that Waldegren has built at least one lightjammer. After all, the essential guts of such a ship, a sphere of anti-matter, aren't all that hard to come by. There are other anti-matter systems besides the Llanithi Consortium. But where was I? Oh, yes.

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The pirate lifts off from Darnstadt, sets course and adjusts speed so as to intercept our ship as she decelerates to sub-light velocity. She jams the Carlotti bands, attacks, seizes."

"And what about the passengers and crew?" asked Listowel.

"If they're lucky, Captain, they'll be prisoners on Darnstadt. That's why we want to take prisoners ourselves."

"The pirate," said Trent, "will probably be armed with rockets, or projectile cannon. Not laser—unless the Waldegren scientists have worked out some way of making it effective at near-light speeds. Quick-firing cannon, I'd say."

"Quicker than your muzzle-loaders," said Sonya to Grimes.

"Almost certainly," he agreed. "But surprise is a good weapon."

III

AS *PAMIR* sped through the nothingness the work of arming her progressed. Ahead of her blazed the stars, those toward which she was steering and those whose laggard light she was overhauling. Filters and shields protected her crew from the dangerous radiations that were a resultant of her velocity. Yet there was still visible light, harsh, intensely blue, light that should not have been seen but that, nonetheless, seemed to penetrate even opaque plating.

But apart from the watch officers nobody had time to look out into space. Those cannon had to be finished and mounted. There was black powder to be mixed and tested, the charges to be packed in plastic bags. There were the springs to be contrived to carry and dampen the recoil of the guns. There were bags of shot to be made up.

Pamir, fortunately, was so designed as to make the mounting of archaic cannon practicable. As a lightjammer, handled inside a planetary atmosphere like an airship, she was fitted with ballast tanks which, of course, were emptied on lift-off. Grimes decided to place his batteries, each of four guns, in the port and starboard wing tanks. To begin with, two crude airlocks were made and welded to the manhole doors leading into the compartments. Spacesuited and carrying laser tools the chief officer and the engineer went into the tanks, first to cut the gunports, then to strengthen the frames to take the weight of the artillery, the thrust of the recoil. The gun mountings were then passed in and welded into place.

The pieces themselves slid in cradles and, on being fired, would be driven back against powerful springs, locking in the fully recoiled position. Loading was fast

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enough—first the bag of powder, then the shot, with a ram-rod to shove all well home. Firing would have to be deferred until the guns were run out again. For firing Grimes had first considered electrical contacts, then some sort of flintlock. He was amused by his final solution—touch-hole and slow match. Even though hand lasers were the slow matches—within the confines of the ship they worked well enough—the principle was a reversion to the very earliest days of firearms.

Then there was the drilling of Trent's marines. They took it all cheerfully enough, making a game of it.

Finally Grimes was satisfied with the rate of fire—although none of the guns had yet actually been fired—under simulated conditions.

Grimes checked personally the ready-use lockers for the bagged charges, the lockers for the improvised shot, the arrangements for passing more ammunition through into the tanks should it become necessary, communications. But there was one more problem. A row of gunports, with the muzzles of guns protruding, is easily detectable. He decided that the cannon would be retained in the fully recoiled position until just before firing and the ports concealed by sheets of plastic. He ordered, too, that the laser batteries be withdrawn into their recesses. They were of no use, anyhow.

"DECELERATION stations," Listowel ordered.

"Make that action stations," said Grimes quietly. "I'm taking over now, Captain."

"So I'm just your sailing master," Listowel commented, but cheerfully enough. "At your service, Commodore." He pressed the bell push. A coded clangor sounded and resounded, short long, short long, short long—the Morse *A*. Fowler fidgeted in his seat at the console, the one from which he would fire and, hopefully, direct the sounding rockets, each of which was now fitted with a high-explosive warhead. The batteries of muzzle loaders were manned. Spacesuited marines were standing by the drainpipe artillery, three to a gun. Handy to the airlocks over the manhole doors were the ammunition parties.

"Cut reaction drive."

"Cut reaction drive, sir."

The muted thunder of the rockets suddenly ceased.

Slowly, carefully, as though this were no more than a routine deceleration, Listowel trimmed his sails, pivoting them about the masts so that the light from the glaring Llanithi stars, almost dead ahead, was striking their reflecting surfaces at an oblique angle. It had to be done gradually. If *Pamir* were suddenly taken aback she would be dismasted. The Doppler Log was starting to wind down. 25.111111 . . .25.111110. . .25.111109. . . The

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lower courses were turned to exercise full braking effect. The lower topsails next—the upper topsails—the top gallants. Speed was dropping fast. Inside the inertialess ship there was no sensory hint of the titanic forces being brought into play, forces that in a normal vessel would have smeared ship and crew across the sky in a blaze of raw energy.

The log was still winding down, although the count was slowing.

1.000007 . . . 1.000005 . . .
1.000003. . .1.000001. . .
1.000001. . .
1.000001. . .
1.000000. . .

Now there was sensation, a feeling of unbearable tension. Something had to give. Something, somewhere, snapped suddenly. Ahead the sparse scattering of stars diminished in number. The Rim Suns—astern in actuality—suddenly flickered out, reappeared in their proper relative bearing.

"Mr. Wallasey," said Listowel, "make the routine ETA call to Llanith." He looked inquiringly toward Grimes, who said, "Yes. We maintain routine—until somebody or something interferes with it."

Wallasey was having his troubles. From the switched-on Carlotti transceiver issued a continuous warbling note.

"Interference—" he muttered.

"Jamming," amended Grimes. "This is it, Captain. Any moment now." He looked around the control room. Fowler was tense over his console, as was Denby, the second officer, at the radar. Wallasey was still twiddling knobs at the Carlotti set. Sonya and Sandra were sitting quietly in their chairs, apparently taking only a mild interest in the proceedings—but either woman, Grimes well knew, could spring into action at an instant's notice. And Sandra, after all, could handle a lightjammer almost as well as her husband.

There was nobody else on the bridge. Willoughby was below, in charge of the damage control party, and Major Trent was looking after the guns manned by his men.

"Target," reported Denby. "Green seventy-five. Range fifty kilometers. Closing."

"Thank you, Mr. Denby. Keep us informed," said Grimes.

"Green now seventy-five, still. Positive altitude five degrees, increasing."

"Range?"

"Forty—and closing."

Grimes spoke into the microphone that carried his voice through the ship and into the gunners' helmet speakers. "This is the commodore. The enemy has been sighted. She is closing fast. From now on there will be frequent changes of trajectory. Stand by to open fire on command. Over."

Trent's voice came in reply, "All is ready, sir. Guns loaded, but not yet run out."

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"Don't run them out until you get the order to fire, Major."

"Green seventy-four, sir. Range thirty, closing. Positive altitude seven degrees. Increasing slowly."

"Captain," said Grimes, "roll us seven degrees to port. I want to keep our friend exactly on the plane of our ecliptic. We can't aim the guns individually—we have to aim the ship. Understand?"

"Understood, Commodore." The directional gyroscopes rumbled briefly as *Pamir* was turned about her long axis.

"And now, Captain, start altering course to port. Just behave as you would normally in trying to avoid a close quarters situation."

Looking through the viewports Grimes saw the sails being trimmed. With the light from the Llanith sun as the wind, *Pamir* was being steadied on to a starboard tack.

"Green eighty-five, opening. Range twenty-five, holding. Altitude zero."

Grimes got up from his chair, went to the big binoculars on their universal mount. He had no trouble picking up the intruder. Her suit of sails made her a big enough target.

He said, "Mr. Wallasey, don't bother any more with the Carlotti set. Try calling on NST."

"Very good, sir." The third officer turned to the normal space-time transceiver, equipment suitable for use only at short ranges. "What shall I say, sir?"

"*Pamir* to unidentified vessel. What ship? What are your intentions? You know."

"*Pamir* to unidentified vessel," said Wallasey, speaking slowly and distinctly. "Come in, please."

Almost immediately a voice replied, "Unidentified vessel to *Pamir*. Maintain your present course and speed. Open your airlocks to receive my boarding party." There was a slight accent. Waldegren? It sounded like it.

Listowel turned to Grimes. "What now, Commodore?"

Grimes grinned. "If we didn't have ladies present I'd tell him to get stuffed. Pass me the mike, Mr. Wallasey." Then he said, in what Sonya referred to as his best quarterdeck voice, "*Pamir* to unidentified vessel. Identify yourself at once. And sheer off. You are getting in my way."

"Unidentified vessel to *Pamir*. Open your airlock doors. Prepare for boarding party. Do not offer resistance. Over."

"Mphm," grunted Grimes, releasing the pressure of his thumb on the TRANSMIT button of the microphone. "I want you to turn away, Listowel. You are master of an unarmed merchant vessel. You can't fight, so you run. Put the Llanith sun dead astern. As long as he sees us doing all the right things he'll be lulled into a sense of security."

Driving surfaces pivoted about their masts, the east sails presenting

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their black sides to the source of light, the west sails their reflective sides. The ship came around fast. And then, on all four masts, the reflective surfaces were spread to catch the full force of the photon gale.

"Bearing green one six five. Altitude zero. Range nineteen. Closing."

"Must have hung out the crew's washing," commented Listowel. "I'm afraid that I can't squeeze any more out of *Pamir*."

"It doesn't matter," Grimes told him. "We want her to catch up." He looked astern through the binoculars. *Pamir's* sails cut off the glare from the Llanith sun and the raider was clearly visible on the starboard quarter. Like *Pamir* she was a four-master, with a cruciform rig, but additional triangular sails had been set between the masts. Running free this would give her a decided advantage.

"Range fifteen. Fourteen. Closing."

"Sir?" asked Fowler appealingly.

"No," said Grimes. "Not yet. We must consider the legalities. She must fire the first shot."

"But those legalities would only apply, sir, if we were a merchant vessel. But we aren't. We're an auxiliary cruiser of the Rim Worlds Navy—"

"A space-lawyer yet!" commented Grimes admiringly. The young man was right, of course. He, Grimes, should have played heavy commodore as soon as contact had been made with the pirate, demanding her unconditional surrender. He might have done just that if he had a real warship under his feet. He decided that, after all, his own way of playing it was the best, especially since the other ship obviously had the heels of *Pamir*. He said, "You can play with your rockets as soon as I give the word, not before. And when you do use them, try for the enemy's rigging, his masts and sails."

"Bearing green one five oh. Closing. Range nine. Closing."

"This is the commodore. Action will be opened shortly. It seems likely that the starboard broadside will be the first to be used."

"Unidentified ship to *Pamir*. You've been asking for trouble. You are about to get it. Over."

"You have our permission to tell him to get stuffed, John," said Sonya sweetly.

"Bearing green one two five. Range seven. Closing."

Shortening sail, thought Grimes, watching through the binoculars. *There're those tri-s'ls or whatever he calls 'em coming in. And I can see ports opening. Boat bays? Or gunports?*

A gout of yellow flame spurted from one of the openings in the raider's hull, just abaft the masts. A long time later, it seemed, there was an explosion ahead of *Pamir*, about half a kilometer distant, a sudden rose of pale fire burgeoning in the

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blackness. So the pirate was using projectile weapons.

"Unidentified vessel—" the joke was wearing thin—"to *Pamir*. That was the last warning. Surrender or take the consequences."

"Bearing green ninety. Range five, four, three—closing."

No identification marks, thought Grimes, studying the other vessel through the powerful glasses. *Could be one of ours, save for a few, subtle points of difference . . .*

He said to Fowler. "All right, Lieutenant. You may open fire."

He saw the first rocket flash from its launching tube, trailing a wake of blue flame, spinning a flimsy filament of incandescence over the shortening distance between the two ships. It got a little over halfway, and then a stream of tracer came hosepiping from a gunport, met it, eroded it into ragged and harmless fragments of spinning debris. The warhead didn't explode.

"Rapid fire!" ordered Grimes. "Get the other five rockets out and on the way as quickly as possible. Don't bother guiding them in. One might get through."

None did. The pirate's machine gunners were fast.

"Range one. Point seven five. Point five."

"Resistance is useless," came the voice from the NST transceiver.

"Starboard broadside, fire," said Grimes into the intercom microphone.

He was not altogether prepared for what happened. He was expecting to see the enemy's sails shredded, his masts cut down, by the shot that he had prepared, the same sort of shot that had been used so effectively during the days of sail on Earth, the bags of scrap metal, nuts and bolts, lengths of metal chain. He had forgotten, though, that one of the old men-o'-war never, when firing a broadside, fired all guns simultaneously—they were fired in quick succession.

Pamir lurched. It was more than a mere lurch. It was as though a giant palm had swatted her on her starboard side. The north and south masts were carried away, each of them falling to starboard as the ship was driven to port by the recoil, the yards of each of them ripping the sails of the east mast, becoming inextricably entangled with the rigging.

"You got her, sir!" Fowler was yelling. "You got her!"

Grimes, who had been knocked down by the violent lateral acceleration, got groggily to his feet, staggered to the starboard viewports. The raider was, indeed, in a sorrier state than *Pamir*. In addition to the damage to her rigging there were gaping holes in her shell plating, through some of which smoke and flame flared explosively, like rocket exhausts. Her control room ports were bright with the ruddy glare of an internal fire. She was spinning slowly about her long axis. The one undamaged main

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spar, the east mast, which had been on her starboard side, shielded from *Pamir's* guns, lifted into view as she rolled, lifted, then dipped toward the other ship—and held steady, a long, metal lance. Freakishly, then, the rotary motion ceased. Perhaps a survivor was still exercising some sort of control, was determined to exact vengeance before his death. And on the far side air, mixed with the gases of combusion, was still escaping into the vacuum, inexorably driving the total wreck on to the near-wreck.

"Range closing," Denby was saying, over and over again. "Range closing. Range closing."

"Reaction drive!" ordered Grimes. "Get us out of here!" He could visualize the end of that long spar driving through *Pamir's* shell plating and piercing the vacuum chamber in which the sphere of anti-matter was suspended in the strong magnetic fields. It was not a nice thing to think about.

Listowel made no reply. The captain was slumped in his seat, unmoving.

Sandra was shaking her husband violently. "Ralph! Wake up! Wake up!" Then, snarling wordlessly, she pulled him from his chair, letting him drift to the deck. Before she was properly seated in his place her long fingers were on the controls. She snarled again, then snapped, "Something's wrong, Commodore!"

"Starboard broadside," ordered Grimes into the intercom microphone. "Fire!" That should push them away and clear from their dying attacker.

"The guns are off their mounts," came a hysterical voice. "We have casualties—"

Denby was still calling out range figures—in meters now—but it was not necessary. The shattered, burning raider was too close and was getting closer.

"Roll her, Sandra!" shouted Grimes.

"But our east mast is some protection—"

"It's not. Roll her, damn you!"

"Roll her," repeated Sonya. "He knows what he's doing." She added quietly, "I hope."

The gyroscope controls and the gyroscopes themselves were still

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working. There was the initial rumble as the flywheels started to turn, then the low hum. The drifting wreck slid slowly from view, dipping below the starboard viewport rims—but if Denby's radar readings were to be credited disaster was now only millimeters distant.

Grimes ordered, "Rotate through ninety degrees. Let me know when you're on eighty-five."

The next few seconds could have been twice that many years.

"Eighty-five," stated Sandra at last.

"Port battery—fire."

Again *Pamir* was slammed by that giant hand and was swatted clear of the dying raider's murderous sidelong advance. The tracks of the two ships diverged—but not fast enough, thought Grimes. He said urgently, "I don't care how you do it, Sandra, but get some of our sails trimmed to catch the light from Llanith. We must get out of here, and fast!"

"But we should board," said Sonya. "There may be survivors. There will be evidence. The fire will burn itself out once the atmosphere in the ship is exhausted."

"Not that sort of fire. Do something, Sandra."

Using the gyroscopes she turned the ship, at last getting the sails of the one surviving mast trimmed to the photon gale. Astern the wreck dwindled in a second to the merest point of light — and then, briefly, became a speck of such brilliance as to sear the retinas of those who watched. It had happened as Grimes had been sure that it must happen. The casing of the sphere of anti-matter had been warped by the heat of the fire—or, perhaps, had been buckled by an explosion. Contact with normal matter had been inevitable.

The pirate was gone, every atom of her structure canceled out.

The pirate was gone and *Pamir* was drifting, crippled. It was the time for the licking of wounds, the assessment of damage before, hopefully, limping into port under jury rig. Men aboard *Pamir* had been injured, perhaps killed. It had been an expensive victory. And Grimes knew that it would not have been so expensive had he remembered to fire the guns of his broadside in succession instead of all at once.

He realized that Fowler, the gunnery officer, was saying something to him. "It was brilliant, sir, brilliant, the way you fought the action—".

He replied slowly, "We won. But—"

"But?" The young man's face wore a puzzled expression.

"But you can't make an omelet without breaking a few eggs," contributed Sonya rather too brightly.

"But you should be able to make one without blowing up the kitchen," was all that Grimes was able to manage in way of reply. ★

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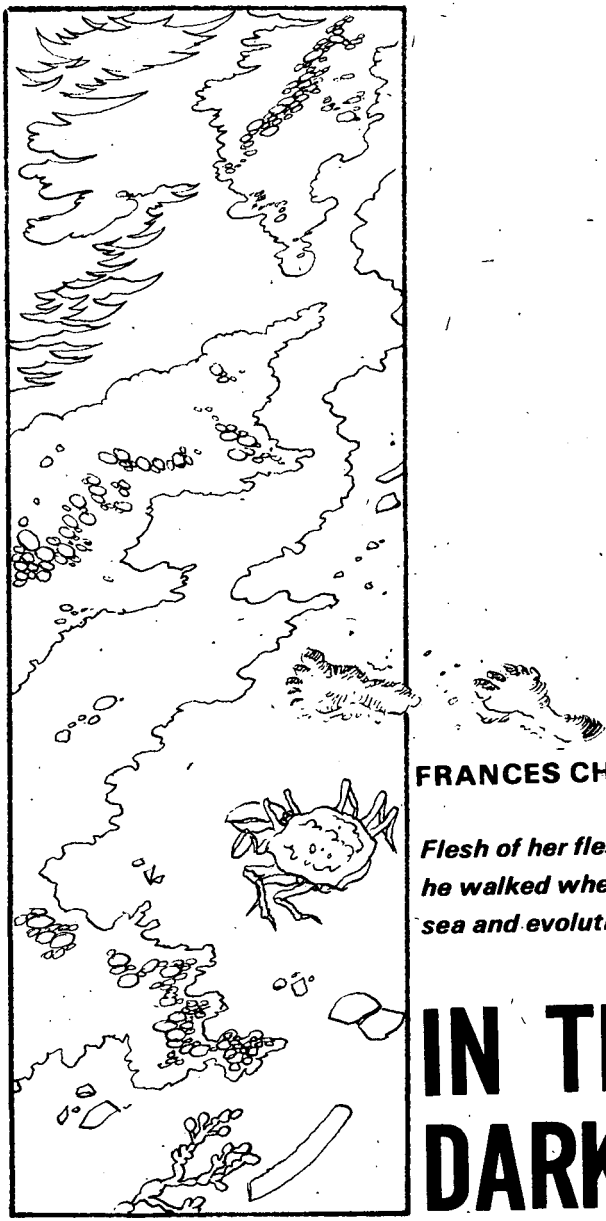

FRANCES CHAPMAN

Flesh of her flesh, yet he walked where the sea and evolution led!

IN THIS DARK SKY

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THE Alothian sea slaps the grainy beach with one of its thunderous and magnificently foamy breakers, making a noise like someone outside my old-fashioned glassine Port-A-Home trying to break in forcibly.

I know there is no threat. Not now. Not the kind that once hung over Alph, my only child. But still, seeming to recall a phrase, ". . . and the sea billows roll," from an ancient Terran work (my academic specialty), I find myself involuntarily going over to the windowport to look, again filled with stubborn hope.

Few stars not wanderers light the immense distances of this forbidding corner of the multiverse. As I peer through the windowport, the dark sky above gives birth to a scattering of falling stars. These wandering ones seem to walk that surface as if it were solid ebony. Actually they are in accelerated free fall, coming from some place, perhaps even the vicinity of Terra's yellow star, that I cannot see from Aloth, and going to some place beyond. Except for those caught in Aloth's sodden gravity and pulled down into searing heat and disintegration. They wink out, cease to exist. Things do get out of control sometimes in our universes, no matter what the scientists say.

People get caught in this gravity, too. It was only a few years ago and I am reminded of that time when—oh, I might have been able to do something. A cold horror grips me as I remember. . .

"THE last time you did that you nearly drowned." I put on some more suntan lotion and, rubbing it into the skin of my belly, I began to think I was getting to be flabby. "And don't go into the water," I admonished. I lay down, toes aimed directly at Sonner, and I felt hot and fat and flabby and burned. Our family has always lived beside one sea or another and been fat, flabby, sunburned and intellectual. Nothing ever changed. Nothing got out of hand. Not even on the other suburban planets where we had been staying out the grants from different universities.

We still didn't know everything about Aloth, but what we had learned was mostly quite ordinary. Even the few curious, inexplicable things that happened seemed to fit the usual pattern. The Olgoth child, for example, had disappeared under mysterious circumstances, but people were always disappearing on newly habited planets, only to reappear a few cycles later with adventurous stories.

"I didn't." He stood over me in all his preschool height, arms akimbo, feet apart, casting a shadow over my belly, where I most wanted to have more tan. My son. My Alph.

It had been misty and cloudy for several weeks of the first sun, Sol, and now that Sonner, its mate, had

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revolved into position, shedding a somewhat harsher mixture of ultraviolet and infrared, we were carefully acquiring our protective coats of tan all over again. Alph was already a little red. Or was his skin now slightly purplish? It was hard to see in this light. Would he mutate, too, like some of the more recent natives? Some do and some don't. Nobody knows why.

"Better cover up," I said, "or get in out of the sun."

Alph's shadow was still there and, turning, I got the blaze of Sonner in my eye. I blinked. "Didn't what?" I rolled over on my side. It is a grotesque position, but necessary if one is to get an even golden tan, and I could talk, if that continued to prove necessary. I rubbed suntan lotion onto the visible portion of my right breast and the bright balls skated over the surface of the skin.

"It was a lake," he said. "And I *didn't* nearly drown." Button-eyed, he was trying to frown at me, but in that bright light and on that smooth face no lines would form at all, not then. He looked like a teddy bear. Would he ever be trim and athletic and muscular? Would he be? No, I thought. He would be a bigger teddy bear like me and like his father and like all of us. Behind him two breakers curving up the beach crashed mightily and shot skyward, exploding into mist. An ancient Terran poet had once called them *seastacks*, like haystacks of the old era. A carpet of foam, thicker than Terran foam, spread almost to Alph's feet.

"At the lake on Terra," I agreed. "And you were drowning, no doubt about it. You didn't even come up the first time. You just went down. I had to dive in after you with my clothes on." I had made an enormous splash, as might be expected, a belly-whopper they used to call it, and the dress, a cheap thing for picnics, was ruined. I had just learned I would never be pregnant again. Still, I *had* saved him. But that was only a lake and this was the mighty ocean of Aloth. I did not want to have to belly-whop into those breakers.

JUST beyond the tumbling of the crests a few surfers bobbed up and down, dark, glistening, prone and paddling with their hands or kneeling and bending as they went through a wave. Sometimes they moved far out, beyond the place where the waves foamed, sitting astraddle their boards in a group, like seabirds, talking, shouting, each to each. Fractions of shouts often reached my ears on the ragged wind. They were the Ugly Brothers, as we humorously called them, with some of their friends, five in all, all natives, born on Aloth of the first pioneer parents, and they had all begun to mutate. The differences were slight—a nearly imperceptible shift in the color of the skin toward an orange shade,

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for instance—faint but absolutely undeniable.

"I wasn't drowning. I liked it down there. It was pretty," Alph protested.

"Just looking around, huh? And you'd come up for air when you were good and ready. Thought you were an Alothian fish. Well, you're just a Terran boy and I couldn't take a chance."

"You got worried." It was an accusation. If I hadn't been so foolish and gotten worried it would not have turned out badly! That's what he was telling me. He cocked an eyebrow, as if pondering. Close to Alothia a covey of catamarans dived over the horizon, one by one. The sea out there looked smooth.

"Sure, I got worried," I said. "You can't live under water, whether you think so or not." I couldn't help laughing. If we were fish, what would he be? A perch, an alocanth, or a catfish? I would be a cod, I felt. And his granddad, the autocrat of the table, would be a chambered nautilus. The sea swept up behind Alph again, closer to my beach towel. I would have to move soon.

"That was a long time ago," Alph said, dismissing it.

"Only two years Terra-time," I said.

"That's a long time," he affirmed. For him it was a long time. Time was different for him.

"Look. I can walk on it." Alph jumped onto the foam. "I'm dancing." Splashes of sand and water arched up and fell on me. A small colony of purplish sand crabs rushed for their holes, scuttling sideways along the lines of fine-ground debris left by the edge of the last wave, peering at us out of their stalked eyes. At the edges of their holes they rocked back and forth, edging cautiously into the sand and waiting, as if hoping that if they waited long enough we would all pack up and go away. One of the younger exobiologists at the institute was sure they were intelligent and hoped soon to establish communication with them. He was on the wrong track: they were intelligent but uncommunicative. Suddenly I felt uneasy under their stares and threw a handful of sand, but none of them moved even a purplish eyestalk.

"Hey, I made quicksand," Alph said. He trampled a boggy hole in the smooth surface of the beach. Could it hungrily open up at any moment and swallow us? "Hey, I need another wave. Come on, you old ocean."

AS IF to oblige him the old ocean slopped up and deposited another wave at his feet.

"You're getting filthy," I said, rising up on my elbow. "Get out of there."

He held his nose with one hand and raised the other up high. "Help, I'm sinking in the quicksand."

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"Out. Right now."

He pulled out a single sandy leg and then the other, two sandy frankfurters that he put down on the towel beside me first and then up on my belly. The frankfurters went up and down as I breathed. The sun was getting lower. The crabs moved in closer, waving their stalked eyes, to watch.

"Why couldn't we?" he asked.

"Why couldn't we what?"

"Oh, live under water."

"We're not fishes."

"Well, walk on the water."

"You mean swim."

"No, I mean walk."

"Impossible! You'd sink like a rock. I know. I had to pull that rock out of the drink."

"In the Old Book, He did it, the old Terran Sorcerer," Alph said, screwing up his eyes to remember the name. "Jizukrist! He cured people and brought this man back to life and He made fishes and wine. And the wizard Daedalus could fly." Alph sat up then, picking up handfuls of sand and sifting them and squinting at me.

"That was on Terra a long time ago, in ancient Judea and ancient Greece. Things like that don't happen any more." The sand was sifting into my hair, into my ear and finally into my mouth.

"We can do it. The Followers did it."

"Not any more. Not this Follower."

"Why?"

"We just don't *believe* enough, perhaps," I said. The sand was tickling my ear.

"I believe," Alph said.

"Is that why you stepped out onto that lake?"

"No, I wasn't thinking about that," he said. He turned away and looked at the sea. "That was an accident. I thought it was ground and it was just some old grass sticking out into the water. I didn't have time to believe."

"You can't walk on water," I said emphatically, closing my eyes tight. "Not even if you believe like the ancient Terran Sorcerer in the Old Book. Maybe you shouldn't read my textbooks."

"Not even on the Dead Sea in the old Holy Land on Terra?" He was sharp, all right. I had told him about that, about the salt in the water, so that you could float. I had walked out once when we (Alph's father and I) had toured there on our honeymoon and, after I had walked just so far out, I couldn't keep my feet down and they flipped up and my head went under. It was like some chemical bath. My eyes were still stinging an hour later, but it was true, you could not sink in that water.

"No. Not even there."

A wave washed up and lapped at my beach towel and the little crabs scurried nearer and then receded. I sat up, only to discover that Alph was wading out into the foam, looking into the sea. All the little

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crabs seemed to be lined up and waving their eyestalks and feelers and watching, just as I was. Off in the distance a large wave began to roll in and the surfers, eyeing it, turned and began to paddle furiously. The taller of the two Ugly Brothers watched the boiling foam approach, got to his knees as he started to move, and then rose up to his feet, picked up by the momentum, and then, waveringly at first, began to walk to the shore.

One by one the other surfers were caught up too and they in turn stood up.

Riding the curler of the wave, just before the place where it was breaking, the tall brother walked, bronze, muscular, like some ancient Terran sea god, walking the waves on into shore.

The invisible hairs on the skin of my arms rose as I realized that he was not on a surfboard at all but was actually skimming the waves with his bare feet. The little purplish crabs waved their eyestalks as if in recognition. I was transfixed.

Alph, like a fledgling bird, stared at the surfers with arms outspread and began to walk. The lowering sun cast its rays around him and my eyes burned to tears as he walked out to meet them, no longer a little teddy bear, but a different being in a different element. The spent fury of the wave lapped up onto my beach towel and, drenched and shivering and unable to move a muscle, I watched him go away. That was the first time he ran away, walking over that strange and foamy sea. . .

Yesterday I saw them on the beach again and tonight, just now, when I heard that wave slap the beach, when I thought I heard that noise outside, I hoped quite unreasonably that it might somehow be Alph trying to come back home again. But it wasn't. I only want my son to come back home again. Is that too much to ask? And, my God, I think I see that lowering sun again, in this dark sky. ★

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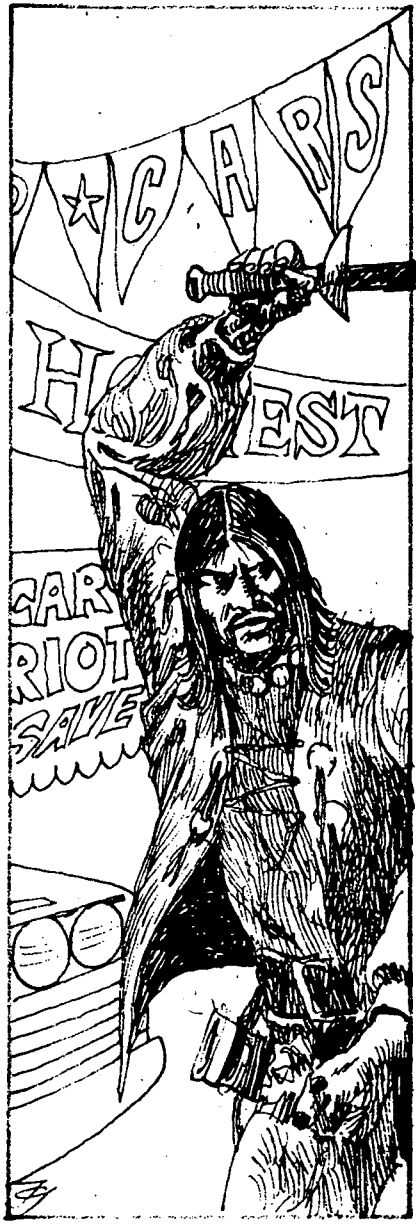

Having mastered the Sea of Time and a king's daughter, he faced an even greater challenge!

GIRL SATURDAY

ROBERT F. YOUNG

HIS first name was Robinson—his last should have been Crusoe. It wasn't though—it was Feeney. His friends called him Robin for short.

When the chronocane came barreling out of the pea-soup mists of the sea of time he was hanging from the fantail of the *Long Long Ago* in a magnetic bo's'n's seat, overhauling the excursion ship's auxiliary drive. The minute he saw what he was in for he jammed the fountain pen-sized energizer he had

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just removed into his jacket pocket—an instant later he was lifted from his perch and borne away on a tumultuous tide of bluenesses and blurs and cinammon-colored convolutions.

Meanwhile, the *Long Long Ago*, by that strange quirk of fate for which time-storms are noted, sailed on unscathed.

Confronted with what appeared to be imminent death, Robin sought to soften it by thinking of how dirt-poor he was, how dirt-poor he had always been and how dirt-poor he probably always would have been. But the countermeasure proved to be unnecessary, for the chronocane turned out to have a heart as well as an eye and, after whisking him this when and that, deposited him unharmed upon the shore of an ISLE.

Or, to break down the acronym, an Integrated Superficial Lenticular Ephemeron.

Robin deduced the nature of his new surroundings even before he glanced up at the sky and saw that the sun occupied a dozen different positions at once, each only slightly removed from the others but combining with them to give an overall effect of a much larger body. The phenomenon resulted, as Robin well knew, from the orbital variations of Earth since its formation and from the presence of more than one latitude.

Getting to his feet, he surveyed the scene in greater detail. Strictly speaking, the shore on which the storm had deposited him was nothing of the sort. It was merely the outer edge of the place-time he happened to be inhabiting. Beyond it the sea stretched endlessly away somewhat in the manner of the upper surface of a vast cloud bank. In a way, being on an ISLE was like being in heaven and, as a matter of fact, all Robin had to do to get back to Earth was to jump. But the trouble was he didn't know where he would land—or when. Possibly in Mycenae, circa 1500 B.C.—possibly in Times Square, circa 1950. Most likely in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, circa it-didn't-make-any-difference.

But perhaps things weren't as bad as they seemed. In his jacket pocket reposed a time-drive energizer that needed nothing more in the way of repairs than a good cleaning, and there was an excellent chance that one or more of the place-times constituting the ISLE might contain the materials for a time raft. True, the ISLE might begin deteriorating any moment—but then again it might hang on for ages.

HE TURNED his back on the sea and took a good look at the place-time he was occupying. It consisted of an unbroken plain about a mile wide and a mile and a half long. Spears and shields were scattered over the immediate foreground. Examining them, he tied in

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the former with the ancient Greek poleis and the latter with the ancient Persian Empire. Unquestionably he was standing on the Plain of Marathon, the *mise en scène* of the historic battle in which the Athenians and the Plataeans had put to rout an invading army that outnumbered them ten to one.

Beyond the plain, in lieu of the historic heights, rose a big green hill that Robin recognized instantly. It was Hill 29, the site of Captain "Idaho" Murphy's famous stand during World War III.

To Robin's left the plain was bordered by the sea; to his right it gave way to two other place-times. One of them—a narrow strip of forest—formed a continuation of the littoral, while the other—a wide expanse of tree-dotted countryside containing a number of grim-looking castles—was conterminous to the plain and Hill 29.

He explored the forest first.

It consisted of first-growth maples, beeches, oaks and elms. They were tall and straight, the aisles between their boles virtually free from sunlight. Robin noticed a slight drop in temperature, but this was due solely to the shielding foliage. Each place-time had its own sun, but owing to their proximity they functioned as one and as a result the ISLE's components received equal amounts of warmth and light.

He came at length to an Amerindian village of twenty Iroquoian long-houses. He decided that the place-time was from stone age North America and constituted the scene of an intertribal battle that, while it may have eluded history, lingered on in the unconscious minds of those whose ancestors had been involved in it.

He entered one of the long-houses and looked around. It was uninhabited of course (an ISLE's endemic life forms were limited to meiofauna), but it contained a sizable cache of Iroquoian corn However, he was certain the ISLE possessed more appetizing fare than desiccated corn, and didn't take any of it with him.

He spent the remainder of the day (according to his wristwatch-calendar, it was Saturday) and the better part of the next exploring his island home. All told, it comprised twelve place-times. He had already identified three of them—the Plain of Marathon, circa 490 B.C.; the Amerindian Forest, circa the sixth-century A.D.; and Hill 29, circa 1998 A.D., He mentally catalogued the castle-haunted countryside adjoining the first three as King Arthur's Kingdom, circa 550 A.D., and the rest as follows: Coventry, circa the time of Lady Godiva's ride; Minos, circa 2,000 B.C.; the Rubicon, circa 49 B.C.; Grendel Land (i.e., the scene of Beowulf's encounter with the monster), circa 500 A.D.; *Yasnava Polyana* (Tolstoy's estate), circa 1908 A.D.;

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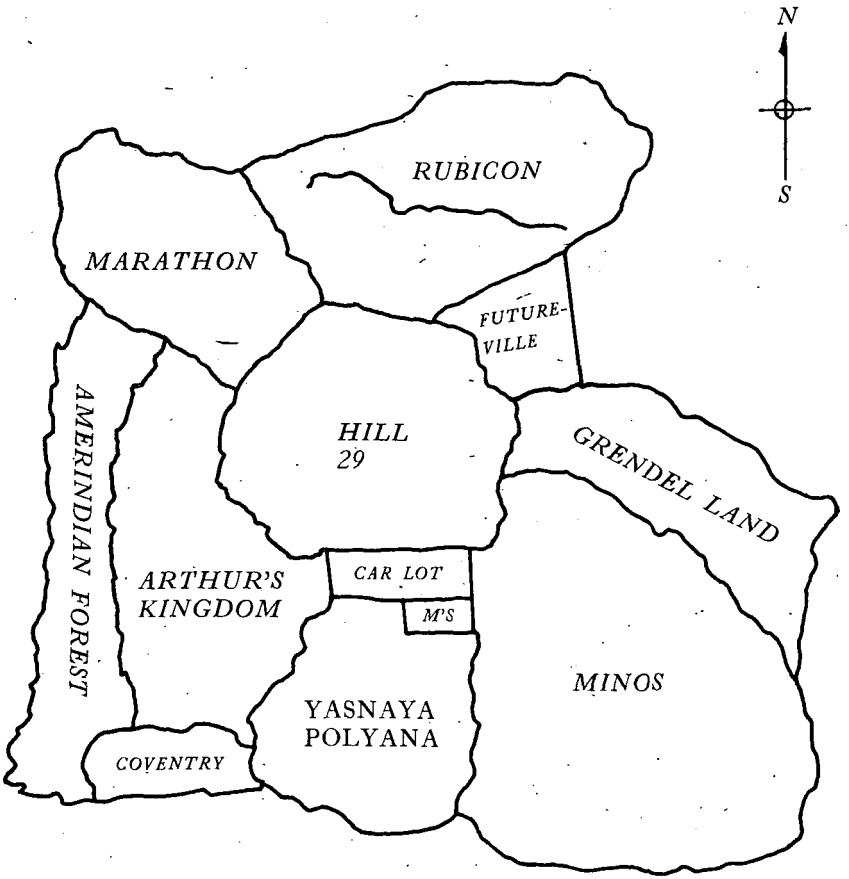
the first MacDougall's hamburger stand, circa 1972 A.D.; Generous George's Used-car Lot, circa 1974 A.D. (Robin would have been at a loss concerning these two if it hadn't been for the self-explanatory signs over their entrances); and Futureville, circa sometime in the far future (he *was* at a loss concerning this one and only assumed that the figure-nine shaped structures he glimpsed in the distance constituted a community.

He drew a map in his mind for future reference.

In most cases only a representative section of the place-time was present. However,



MAP OF ISLE

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Generous George's Used-car Lot, MacDougall's and *Yasnaya Polyana* appeared to be intact.

The Used-car Lot delighted him. Not only did it adjoin MacDougall's, making for convenience in the way of meals, but the cars parked in it would provide him with the materials he needed to build a raft. In addition, many of them contained tools and in one of them—a beat-up Chevy van—he found an acetylene torch and tanks and a small electric arc-welder.

Yasnaya Polyana afforded the most direct route to the sea, but it was heavily forested in places and he decided that when the time came he would launch the raft from the Plain of Marathon. This would involve passing through part of King Arthur's Kingdom, but the terrain didn't look too bad and was definitely a better bet than that of Minos.

LIKE most such lots, Generous George's was strung with overhead wires from which hung little plastic pennants of various colors. In one corner stood a small wooden structure in which were an office and a lavatory. The former contained a desk, two chairs, a collapsible cot and a miscellany of other items. The wall next to the door held a metal fuse box. It was connected through quinque-dimensional space to the same source of power that supplied the original, and the lot's lights—four overhead self-activating fluorescent units—would go on as soon as darkness fell. For the same reason the taps in the lavatory and those in MacDougall's dispensed running water, while the two fuel pumps just within the lot's entrance dispensed regular and premium gasoline.

Robin rigged up an outdoor shower and connected it to the cold-water tap in the lavatory by means of heater-hose lengths commandeered from several of the cars. After washing up he went to work. To obtain parts he tore down a 1970 Buick Riviera, a 1972 Chevrolet Bel Air and a 1969 Ford Torino. The job took him five days. On the sixth—his eighth day on the ISLE—he went prospecting for quartz.

It was almost dark before, high on the seaward side of Hill 29, he found the kind he was looking for. After mining the small amount he needed for the time-drive he pocketed it and turned to leave. As he did so he happened to glance out to sea. He gasped. A ship was approaching the ISLE.

As time-ships go it was not a large one and its time vanes—or sails—seemed disproportionately wide. Obviously it had just surfaced or he would have noticed it before. As he watched, it touched the edge of the Plain of Marathon and came to a halt.

ISLEs, owing to their ephemeral nature and to the navigational problems they gave rise to, were

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generally avoided like the plague. Consequently Robin found it hard to believe his eyes. Nevertheless, they were giving it to him straight. As he stared, the forward nacelle opened and seven passengers and/or time sailors disembarked. One of them appeared to be a prisoner.

II

NO ONE living in Robinson Feeney's day really knew what an ISLE was, but there were plenty of theories making the rounds and one of them—the one Robin himself subscribed to—has turned out to be substantially correct.

It proposed that the collective unconscious is tied in with the space-time continuum and that when any given race memory becomes firmly enough established it materializes in the form of a "place-time" on the so-called surface of the so-called temporal sea. By the same token, when the race memory behind any given place-time lapses for any reason, that place-time deteriorates and disappears and, because of the physical factors involved, the place-times that have combined with it to form an ISLE deteriorate and disappear also. Hence, the longevity of an ISLE is arbitrarily determined by the longevity of the weakest of its components.

The creative process that results in a place-time can be likened to a projector throwing an image on a screen, the projector being the mass memory of the human race at any given time and the screen being the surface of the temporal sea. Granted, the analogy is an oversimplification, but it is only by oversimplifying complex phenomena such as the one here involved that we can conceive of them at all. Therefore, although we are dealing here with five dimensions and the make-believe room in which we have placed our make-believe projector and screen comprises only four (the fourth being time as it is generally understood), the analogy still enables us to obtain some idea of what a place-time—and by extension, an ISLE—is all about. But it must be remembered that what we are visualizing in four dimensions actually involves five and that our screen encompasses yesterday, today and tomorrow and is not subject to the same laws that govern our earthly existence. And it must also be remembered that our projector represents only one of a long line of similar projectors that stretches from the remote past through the present and on into the far future.

These qualifications make a number of things clear: (1) how a place-time can seemingly have only one surface and yet be dimensionally identical to the original; (2) why chronology proper plays no part in the grouping together of place-times into ISLEs; (3) why

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many of the historic locales that men still remember do not exist on the so-called surface of the so-called temporal sea.

Finally, the incongruities that confront us when we view an ISLE are the product not of the ISLE but of our preconditioning. Were we to view such phenomena solely with respect to the similarity of their components' seasons, all the while keeping in mind that geography is a three-dimensional concept, these incongruities would not exist. Suffice to say, whatever it is that causes place-times to unite into ISLEs, once the union is consummated the resultant montage is cemented by a twenty-four-hour cycle of day and night that repeats itself over and over until the ISLE's demise. And time, while it passes in one sense, does not, in another, pass at all.

UNDERSTANDABLY Robin was filled with joy at the sight of the ship. However, his joy didn't overwhelm his natural caution and, instead of running down the side of Hill 29 and across the plain to welcome the new arrivals, he blended himself against the trunk of a nearby tree and sat down to watch.

The landing party had set out single file in the direction of the Amerindian Forest. Some members carried boxes, others sacks. The one Robin had taken for a prisoner carried nothing—even so, he seemed to be having trouble keeping up with the others. Possibly because he was little more than half their size.

When the party was halfway to the forest someone on the ship closed the forward nacelle—and a moment later the ship backed away from the ISLE, extended its sails and sank out of sight.

Crestfallen, Robin stared at where it had been. The good old Feeney luck was working overtime.

But he was certain that the ship would be back in the near future to pick up those it had left here. Perhaps in the meantime he could make their acquaintance and assure a berth for himself on the trip back to the present. First, however, he would do a little spy work and find out what they were doing on the ISLE.

He watched the landing party make its way single-file across the plain. By the time it reached the forest and disappeared among the trees the sun was low in the west—however, he decided to wait a while longer before leaving the hill. Dusk came. He saw smoke rising above the distant treetops and knew that the newcomers had made camp. Descending the hillside diagonally into King Arthur's Kingdom, he made his way across the ancient English countryside to his destination. By now night had fallen and the sky was crammed with stars. Literally crammed with them, because it contained not only the visible stars of more than one

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latitude, but the visible stars as they appeared from the various place-times. Like the sun, the gibbous moon that presently rose in the east occupied a dozen different places at once.

Entering the forest, Robin saw firelight flickering among the trees up ahead and he made his way cautiously toward its source. At length he found himself on the outskirts of the Amerindian village. Creeping closer and peering around the corner of one of the long-houses, he saw that the fire had been built in front of the largest dwelling. It was not the one he had entered earlier and he wished now that it had been, for he had a hunch that it was the new arrivals' headquarters and that this was far from the first time they had visited the ISLE.

Suspended over the fire on a makeshift tripod was a big black kettle and from it rose steam. Within the circle of firelight six men were grouped around a glittering pile of finger rings, bracelets, amulets, necklaces, brooches, earrings and various other items, arguing in loud voices.

Tied to a tree on the other side of the fire was a girl.

She had copper-colored hair and amber eyes. Her features were at once delicate and strong. Her eyebrows made Robin think of swallows flying south.

Her dress appeared to be silk and was either ultra modern or ultra ancient. Golden in color, it fell all the way to her golden-slippered feet. In a number of places it had been torn, as though ornaments had been ripped from it. Returning his gaze to the pile of jewelry, Robin saw several iridescent sequins.

Slowly the truth dawned on him. At the time of her capture she had been wearing all those jewels and all those ornaments!

He studied her captors. Their speech seemed to consist of grunts and squeals. He was unable to make out what they were saying. The men averaged about seven and a half feet in height, were swarthy of skin and wore bloomerlike trousers that hung in tatters around their knees. Their black hair was long, unkempt, and kept falling over their eyes. Their faces were either clean-shaven or naturally hairless—probably the latter. They wore plastic rings in their noses and their teeth, either naturally discolored or artificially blackened, were filed to points. Each had a long cutlass stuck through his belt.

Buccaneers? Cannibals? Hillbillies? Robin found himself thinking of them as "Buccannibillies."

Identifying their civilization was something else again. One thing was for certain—they were not from his. Nor were they from any of the past ones he had come into contact with. Perhaps they came from the future. Impossible. Contact had never been made with the future.

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The men had apparently decided to postpone dividing their captive's jewelry till later in the evening. They were now clustered around the fire and, as Robin watched, first one and then another reached into the steaming kettle, fished out a large chunk of meat and devoured it in two or three bites. The procedure was repeated again and again, to the accompaniment of loud lip-smacking and deep grunts.

The captive looked on from contemptuous eyes. Presently one of the men—an eight-foot giant with tangled hair hanging over his face—fished out a piece of meat and took it to the tree where she was tied. After pinching her cheek he held the meat against her mouth. She almost bit his finger off.

Yelling, he raised his hand as though to strike her. But the hand never descended. The scathing look she gave him was so intense and so utterly devoid of fear that he turned and slunk away.

But her reprieve was temporary at best and Robin knew it.

He sighed. The last thing in the world he wanted was a Girl Friday. Nevertheless, he was shortly going to have one.

III

LEAVING the village behind him, he hurried to the edge of the forest. He hauled all the dead wood he could find out onto the plain and piled it into a large pyre. He applied a match, waited till the flames got going good, then began stomping around it, giving vent to series of what he thought were pretty good Indian war whoops. He kept up his howling for about five minutes, then reentered the forest.

He took a circuitous course back to the village, careful to make as little noise as possible. The little he did make was presently drowned out by the girl's captors as they crashed through the underbrush on a direct route to the plain.

He had gambled on their leaving only one of their number behind and this was exactly what they had done. The man turned out to be none other than the Good Samaritan who had offered the girl part of his supper. He was bolstering his courage with the contents of a large jug and eyeing the girl covetously through his hair.

Robin found a good-sized rock and clobbered him on the back of the head. He dropped the jug and toppled like a felled tree.

Robin borrowed his cutlass long enough to cut the girl's plastic bonds. Disbelief had come into her eyes when he had felled her captor. Now hope replaced it. But she didn't collapse into Robin's arms with a profound sigh of thanksgiving as he half expected her to—instead she ran over to the pile of loot and began slipping amulets onto her arms, bracelets onto her wrists and rings onto her fingers.

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Robin seized her arm and tried to pull her to her feet. She pushed him away.

"Begone!" she said in Anatolian.

Anatolian was the language of ancient Asia Minor. Foremost among the countries where it had been spoken was Lydia.

A bell began ringing in Robin's mind, but as yet it wasn't loud enough for him to get its import.

Again he seized the girl's arm, and this time he succeeded in pulling her to her feet.

"Do you want to be here when they get back and have them tie you to that tree again?" he demanded.

Her amber eyes widened in surprise at his easy familiarity with her language. They also snapped.

"I will not leave without my jewels! Release me this instant!"

He did so. "We'll take them with us, but there's no time for you to put them on."

He removed his jacket, spread it on the ground and piled the rest of the jewels and ornaments on it. Then he brought the ends together, stood up and slung the makeshift sack over his shoulder. "Come on," he said, and set out in the direction of King Arthur's Kingdom.

THIS time the girl obeyed him—for the very good reason, no doubt, that he was carrying her ornaments and her jewels—and together they hurried through the forest. From the plain came the shouts of her captors, but there was no indication as yet that they had discovered they had been faked out of position.

"What's your name?" Robin asked the girl presently, as they left the forest behind them.

He told her his.

Almost a full minute passed. Then, just as he was beginning to think she wasn't going to tell him, she said, "Manijeh."

"That's a pretty name. Where are you from?"

Silence.

"All right—don't tell me."

"I am from Sardis."

Sardis. Again the bell began to ring, but still not loudly enough.

"Why did those men capture you?"

"They did not tell me, so I do not know. Not only do they act like pigs, they talk like swine. Except one, who spoke as I do—but him they left behind.

Robin helped her across a little brook, careful not to hold her arm a single second longer than was absolutely necessary.

"Why do you *think* they captured you?"

"To extort riches from my father, of course."

"Your father must be very—" Robin began—and stopped. While he and Manijeh had been talking the shouts of her captors had faded away. Now the voices had started up again, much closer at hand, and he knew her escape had been discovered. "Hurry," he told Manijeh.

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"They'll start looking for us now."

He led the way at a brisk dogtrot to Generous George's Used-car Lot. The fluorescent units had come on, creating an oasis of brightness in the night. The paleness of Manijeh's face as she followed him into the lot attested to her wonderment and fear, but she said nothing.

He took her to the office, told her to stay inside, then ran over to the parts bank he had accumulated and began assembling a field-fence adapter. He worked swiftly, aware that he and Manijeh might have left a trail that their pursuers could follow by starlight. When he finished he carried the adapter into the office and connected it to an unused circuit of the fuse box. Two spare fuse cartridges and a fuse-puller were lying at the base of the box, a fact that he had noted earlier. He stood one of the cartridges on end and placed the fuse-puller next to it so he could insert the former in a hurry when the time came.

Meanwhile, Manijeh had been putting on her jewelry. Robin stared at her. She looked like a Christmas tree. Disgusted, he returned to the parts bank and built five post pacs. He installed one on the lot's northwest corner, one on the northeast corner, one on the southwest corner and the remaining two on the southwest and southeast corners of MacDougall's parking lot. As he was installing the last one he glimpsed a furtive movement in the darkness beyond the radiance shed by MacDougall's outdoor fluorescents, which had also come on with the departure of daylight.

HE FINISHED the job fast and rose to his feet. As he did so he caught the gleam of a cutlass out of the corner of his eye. Another. The office was visible around the edge of the hamburger stand. It was a million miles away—perhaps two. Whichever, he knew he'd never be able to reach it in time.

"Manijeh!" he shouted. "In the box on the wall there's a little pair of tongs. Pick up the upright cylinder with them and shove it into the empty slot—do it now! But whatever you do, don't touch it!"

He repeated the instructions twice. Hell, she'd never understand! How could she? She had never seen a fuse box before in her life, to say nothing of a fuse cartridge or a fuse-puller. Even if she did by some miracle succeed in gripping the cartridge she'd never succeed in inserting it properly.

He could see the pirates, kidnapers or whatever they were now. There were six of them (apparently the Good Samaritan had recovered) and they were pounding out of the darkness of *Yasnaya Polyāna* toward MacDougall's for all they were worth. Robin began to run for the office. Halfway there he shouted the instructions again.

Abruptly Manijeh appeared in

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the doorway. She stomped her foot. "I *did* pick it up!" she said. "I *did* shove it in! I *didn't* touch it! Do you think I am deaf?"

Robin slowed to a halt, turned around. She had indeed activated the fence. The foremost pirate bounced back six feet when he collided with it and sparks shot from his hair. An identical fate overtook the second and their howls of pain were faintly audible from beyond the invisible barrier. The remaining four braked just in time and, as Robin watched, helped their fallen comrades to their feet. Then the six of them slunk back into the shadows of *Yasnaya Polyana*, there no doubt to reconnoiter and to try to devise a means to breach the fence.

Robin wasn't worried. From what he had seen of them so far, it would tax their know-how to breach chicken-wire.

Whistling, he covered the rest of the distance to the office. Manijeh was still standing in the doorway, her jewels having an iridescent glow in the blazing fluorescence, her eyes fixed on the darkness of *Yasnaya Polyana* into which the Buccannibillies had disappeared.

"I knew they were arrant cowards," she said. "I knew it all along."

All the jewelry that had been in the makeshift sack was now on her—diamond- and ruby-studded golden disks and brooches, silver bracelets, golden amulets, lapis lazuli necklaces, emerald earrings, diamond fingerrings, golden shoe buckles . . . Robin began to have some idea of the true extent of the fortune that her kidnapers had let slip through their fingers.

Could there possibly be more where it came from? The mere thought staggered his imagination.

But that was because he was looking at the situation through the eyes of a poor man. For all he knew, her father might own all of Asia Minor. He might even have gone down in history. History was full of rich men—rich men and despots. Maybe her father was both.

"Who is your father, Manijeh?" he asked.

"King Croesus," she answered.

IV

ROBIN'S father was as poor as a church mouse.

Once he had said to Robin, *Steer clear of rich bitches, son. They like nothing better than to spit on people like us . . .*

Another time he had said, *Son, if you can find a way to do it marry a rich bitch some day. It just might beat being on welfare—you never know . . .*

From which it can be seen that Robin's father was nothing if he was not inconsistent.

This was because he was afflicted with an ambivalent attitude toward the rich. As a lifetime welfarer and

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a charter member of the International Brotherhood of United Welfare Recipients he instinctively regarded the wealthy as the natural enemy—and as a lifetime member of a society devoted to meretricious materialism he couldn't help but admire them for having accumulated so many possessions.

Robin himself was also afflicted with an ambivalent attitude toward the rich, but his ambivalence was more extreme than his father's. He, too, instinctively regarded them as a natural enemy, but he did not simultaneously admire them—he worshiped them. There was a teaspoonful of Honoré de Balzac in him, a tablespoonful of F. Scott Fitzgerald and a cupful of Horatio Alger.

To aggravate his present position still further, his attitude toward the fair sex had been molded by the complete works of Zane Grey, James Oliver Curwood, Harold Bell Wright and Charles Alden Seltzer, books which his Great Grandfather Feeney had picked up at a rummage sale and which had been with the Feeney family ever since.

Consequently, while his reaction to his Girl Friday's momentous disclosure involved two separate emotions, the romantic haze through which he was accustomed to regard womankind made it impossible for either to manifest itself.

Otherwise, however, his mind was quite clear and the ungodly crew's motive in being on the ISLE was a mystery no longer. They were using it as a hideout while their confederates negotiated a ransom settlement with Croesus.

A thought occurred to him. "Manijeh, did they make you write a letter to your father?"

"They tried to make me. When I would not they pulled all the combs from my hair and said they would show them to him as proof I was their prisoner. The pigs!"

Robin wondered if they would have returned her unharmed. He doubted it. In any case, they no longer had the option. It was up to him to return her—to take her back to Sardis—preferably before the ransom was paid.

He informed her of his intentions.

She put her hands on her hips and looked at him scornfully. "Take me back to Sardis—ha! How can you take me back to Sardis when you cannot possibly know which way to go?" She tossed her head in the direction taken by the retreating kidnapers. "After those stupid goats stole me from my father's garden they became lost in a fog—and I do not think even they know which direction to take to get back down from this bewitched mountaintop! How then can *you* know?"

Robin was justifiably piqued. "It just so happens that I do know," he said. "And what's even more important, I know how." He pointed to the time raft, which at this stage of its construction even he had to

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admit didn't inspire much confidence. "We're going to Sardis in that—after I finish building it. Now that I've got you to help me it'll be done in no time."

She drew herself up in the doorway and looked down at him disdainfully. "I do not know from what wretched land you come," she said, "but from your apparel I would judge you to be a goatherd from the hills of Mysia and from your manners a swineherd from the outlands of Phrygia. The daughter of King Croesus would not so much as lift her little finger to help either—and were either to address her in so presumptuous a fashion in her father's kingdom a hole would be drilled through his tongue and a redhot skewer thrust through it!"

Poor Robin didn't know what to say. He should have been indignant, but he wasn't. Instead of instinctively wanting to tell her off for what she had said he instinctively wanted to apologize for what he had said.

IT WAS what he got for not listening to his father. *Stay on dole and you'll keep your dignity,* the elder Feeney had told him and he had been right. You'd never catch a professional welfarer letting some rich bitch walk all over him—he had *pride*. True, a welfarer never had very much money, but the difference between him and someone like Robin, who placed independence above common sense, was that the former never had to worry about where his money was coming from while the latter had to worry all the time. Unless—unlike Robin—he had an aptitude for one of the more lucrative trades or professions. Otherwise he had to scrounge and pay for his independence with his pride. If he were Robin he studied languages day and night so he could go to sea—only to discover that a ship's linguist, even when his natural mechanical ability automatically qualified him for a first-class mechanic's rating, enjoyed a status similar to cabin boy and didn't draw a great deal more in the way of wages.

Robin sighed. Maybe his ten sisters and his eight brothers had been right when they unanimously voted him the black sheep of the family. However you looked at it, the time for him to assert himself was on hand. So maybe he was as poor as a church mouse and his Girl Friday as rich as a five- and dime-store heiress—she was still his Girl Friday. He'd show her who was the boss right now.

"I'm hungry," Manijeh declared. "Fetch me something to eat."

Robin didn't remember his resolve till he was halfway to MacDougall's. By then, of course, it was too late. It had been too late in the first place. In MacDougall's he made coffee, french fries and hamburgers (there was enough food in the refrigerators and the freezers and the cupboards to last him and a

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Manijeh a whole year), prepared a tray for her and one for himself and carried both back to the office. It was strange fare for a sixth-century B.C. maiden and for a moment he thought she was going to turn up her nose at it. She didn't, though, and after the first bite devoured everything on her tray.

It was clear, however, from the frigid glances she repeatedly cast in his direction that having to sit at the same table with a common goatherd outraged her sensibilities. But she made no comment.

It had been his intention to inform her in the best James Oliver Curwood tradition that the cot in the office was hers and that he would bed down either in MacDougall's or in the back seat of one of the used cars. However, this proved to be unnecessary.

"Begone," she said when he picked up the trays. "I would sleep."

Sadly he carried the trays and the plastic cups and containers back to MacDougall's and dumped them into one of the disposal bins. Then he returned to the used-car lot and after finding a back seat that was almost wide enough for him to stretch out on, settled down for the night.

THE kidnapers showed up early the next morning, arrayed themselves a respectful distance beyond the fence and brandished their cutlasses. Robin ignored them, rigged a tarpaulin around the outdoor shower and washed himself vigorously, wishing mournfully for a razor (he had by this time grown a frizzly brown beard). He was about to step outside when Manijeh appeared in the office doorway, yawning. Fortunately his clothes were within reach and he put them on.

"Why have you been pouring water on your head?" Manijeh asked when he stepped into the morning sunshine.

He glared at her. "It's an old Mysian custom."

She parted the tarp and peered inside.

"To turn it on," Robin explained, "you twist that little round disk. To turn it off, you twist it the other way. You stand under that bucket with the holes in its bottom. The water's cold and there isn't any—any—" (he discovered there was no Anatolian word for soap). "Well anyway," he concluded, "you'll find it an invigorating experience."

"Ha!" Manijeh said. "You would never catch the daughter of King Croesus pouring water on her head."

And she had called *him* a Mysian goatherd!

"Fetch me something to eat," the daughter of King Croesus continued. "I am hungry."

He made fresh coffee and fried hamburgers and they breakfasted at Generous George's desk.

"Why didn't you cook some

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more of those delicious little biscuits?" Manijeh asked.

Biscuits? "Oh, you mean french fries. I'll fix some for dinner. Meanwhile," Robin added meaningfully, "I've got work to do."

After disposing of the breakfast dishes he got busy on the raft. The pirates watched for a while, brandishing their cutlasses whenever he happened to glance in their direction—then, evidently becoming bored, they withdrew into the rocky wilderness of Minos.

Noon came. "I am hungry," Manijeh called from the office doorway. "Fetch me something to eat."

Robin gritted his teeth. Some Girl Friday he had! Come to think of it, though, he'd rescued her on a Saturday, which made her his Girl Saturday, not Friday.

The good old Feeney luck had been working overtime, as usual.

While he was peeling the potatoes for the french fries in MacDougall's kitchen he sensed someone standing just behind him and out of the corner of his eye he saw Manijeh peering around his shoulder.

"Is that the way the little biscuits are made?" she asked.

"That's only the first step. Here, let me show you."

Craftily he slipped the paring knife into her right hand and placed a potato in her left. "You turn it like this, see? And while you're turning it, you peel."

After she finished with the peeling he showed her how to put the potatoes in the slicer and then how to put them in the wire basket and immerse them in the deep fat, which he had heated beforehand. Then he showed her how to fry hamburgers and make coffee. She was so thrilled that several times she clapped her hands out of sheer delight and when the boiling water rose magically from the lower to the upper globe of the coffeemaker, she uttered an awed: "Ahhhhhh!"

They ate at one of MacDougall's indoor tables. Afterward, Robin showed Manijeh where to throw away the disposable cups and plates. Then he went back to work. The day grew hot. Along about three o'clock he heard water running, and looking in the direction of the outdoor shower he saw a golden dress hanging over the ring to which the tarp was attached. That evening at supper her copper-colored hair, still not quite dry but neatly combed (apparently she had secreted one of her combs from her kidnapers), fell in straight moist tresses to her shoulders and shone softly in the subdued fluorescence of MacDougall's dining room.

LIKE most such establishments, Generous George's Used-car Lot was a heat trap. The mornings weren't bad, but every afternoon the temperature climbed into the high nineties and—as the sea of time was incapable of providing so

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much as a zephyr and as the fence would have kept it out in any case—there was no relief till the sun went down. And even then there wasn't very much to speak of. The only shade available (discounting the ephemeral shadows cast by the office and the hamburger stand) was that thrown by a great oak that stood in the wedge of *Yasnaya Polyana* the field-fence had made part of the car lot/MacDougall complex. And this was not available to Robin because he was building the raft in the center of the car lot and couldn't afford to take time off except to eat and sleep.

But while the shade was not available to Robin, it was available to his Girl Saturday. She set the more comfortable of the two office chairs under the tree and sat there by the hour, polishing her jewelry with an old chamois cloth she had found in one of the cars. Occasionally she grew bored and took a walk around the lot, looking at this used car and that, a baffled expression on her face. When the pirates came around, as was their custom once or twice a day, she would interrupt her perambulations or her polishing long enough to stick out her tongue at them. After several futile attempts to breach the invisible barrier by rolling boulders from Minos up Hill 29 and letting them come tumbling down the slope and into the fence, they had apparently given up and now confined their activities to sitting on the ground in the shade of a rock or tree and watching Robin work, a pastime that seemed to be enjoying greater and greater popularity on the ISLE.

At first Manijeh paid the raft not the slightest attention, but as it began to acquire form she evinced an increasing interest in it. At length—one afternoon when the temperature was nudging a hundred—she came over to where he was working and asked what he was making.

He was lying on a creeper under the deck plating, installing a Revlin relay-instigator that he had built the night before. He propelled himself out into the sunlight, stared up at her in disbelief.

"I thought I told you. It's what I'm going to take you back to Sardis in."

"You did tell me. But you didn't tell me what you call it."

"It's a raft."

"She looked around. "I do not see any water."

"Of course you don't—it's not that kind of a raft."

"And we are going to Sardis on it?"

"That's right."

"Ha!"

"You didn't say 'ha' the other night when I put up the fence," Robin said.

"What fence?"

He pointed to the pirates, who were lolling in the shade of a big Minoan boulder. "The fence that

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keeps them from coming in here, chopping me into mincemeat and carrying you off."

She looked in the direction he had indicated. "I do not see any fence."

"Naturally you don't. It's invisible."

She put her hands on her hips and gazed down at him. "Your face is dirty," she observed.

The abrupt change of subject disconcerted him and for a moment he forgot how dirt-poor he was, had always been and always would be and that she was the daughter of one of the richest men in all creation.

"Of course it's dirty," he said. "And I'm tired and I'm thirsty, too. And do you know why? It's because I've been working myself half to death to get you off this 'mountaintop' and safely back to your father's kingdom—"

She looked at him for a long time. Then, without another word, she turned and walked away.

Awed by his outburst, he propelled himself back under the raft and began plying an end wrench. Some time later, out of the corner of his eye, he saw Manijeh coming out of the office carrying a paper cup. He gaped. Presently the raft cut her from view till all he could see were her feet.

"Well, are you going to come out and quench your thirst or not?" she said. "Or do you perhaps think I am going to crawl under there with this container of water and hold it while you drink?"

Slowly he propelled himself back into the sunlight. He accepted the paper cup, drained it and handed it back. "Th-thanks."

He was about to shove himself back under the raft. "Wait," she said. "You forgot your instrument."

She handed him the end wrench.

"Th-thanks," he said again.

It took him five more minutes to finish installing the instigator and when he reemerged into the sunlight he expected Manijeh to be gone. Instead he saw her standing at the other end of the raft, studying an electric booster motor he'd set in place and drilled holes for but hadn't gotten around to bolting down.

"I believe," she said, "that I could secure this funny-looking object if I were to be supplied with the necessary instrument."

He handed her a socket wrench. She worked beside him the rest of the day. When evening came her face was as dirty as his was, all her knuckles were skinned and her million-dollar dress was a mess.

"Tomorrow," she said, "I will get up before you do and prepare breakfast. That way, we will be able to get back on the job sooner."

V

FOR a while things went swimmingly, although as the days

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passed it became increasingly clear to Robin that long before the raft was finished, King Croesus would have come across with the ransom. Something of the sort must have been on Manijeh's mind, for one night while they were sitting in Generous George's office, she said, "How soon will it be before we leave for Sardis, Ro-bin?"

He looked up from the time-drive ganglion he was assembling on the opposite side of the desk. "I thought you didn't believe I could find my way to Sardis."

"Would I be helping you to build the raft if I still did not believe it?"

He returned his attention to the ganglion. "No, I guess you wouldn't. We should be able to leave in two more days."

There was a silence. Then: "Why is it that you wish to take me back to my father?"

"Because that's where you belong."

There was another silence—a much longer one. At length: "My father will probably reward you handsomely," she said.

The possibility hadn't even entered Robin's mind. "I'm not doing it for a reward."

"I did not say you were."

He looked at her across the desk. That evening, as had been her custom since she had begun to help him with the raft, she had removed all her jewels and ornaments, polished them and then, after taking a shower, had put them all back on. But from some strange reason she didn't seem to glitter quite as much as usual.

"I guess my not thinking of a reward makes me seem kind of foolish," he said.

Her amber eyes snapped. "I did not say that either! You are putting words into my mouth again. Moreover, I think that I shall go to bed!"

She did not point to the door and say "Begone!" but she might just as well have. He pocketed his tools, rose to his feet and picked up the ganglion. Eventually, he supposed, if he were to remain in her company long enough, he would get used to her outbursts. They no longer bugged him as much as they used to. But "eventually" did not apply—in a few more days they would part and he would never see her again.

He stepped over to the doorway. "Good night, Manijeh," he said.

"Good night—Ro-bin."

THE next morning they had a visitor.

Rather, they had nine visitors—the six who had been left with Manijeh on the ISLE, their confederates—two in number—who had departed in the time ship, plus a third party.

But it was the third party who was the actual visitor—the others were merely spectators.

He stepped forward and attached a small, two-way magnetic

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microphone to the field-fence, where it hung magically suspended in the morning air some six inches from his mouth.

"My name is—" (Robin couldn't quite catch the words, but they sounded like "Coal Bin"), he said in late twentieth-century English, a language that must have predated his own by centuries. "My presence on the periphery of your fastness arises from an urgent necessity to negotiate a satisfactory settlement of our dispute. I think you will find the terms I have to offer eminently equitable and, under the circumstances, more than generous."

He was somewhat smaller than his uncouth friends, although unquestionably of the same species. His long black hair was thickly pomaded with what looked like axle grease and was parted precisely in the middle of his scalp and combed straight down on either side of his face to his shoulders, where it curled upward into a sort of semicircular eavetrough. He wore a canary-yellow vest. Lime-green jodhpurs, black imitation-leather leggings and narrow black oxfords with pointed toes. There was no ring in his nose and presumably there were none in his ears. Nor were his teeth filed to a point or blackened—instead they were perfectly formed and dazzlingly white. As he talked he displayed them by means of a wide smile that went on and off at regular intervals as though activated by an automatic switch hidden somewhere in his head.

"What sort of terms?" Robin asked.

"Terms pertaining to the disposition of your companion and her paraphernalia and to your departure from this ISLE." The smile went on and off like an electric lightbulb. "As president of our small but powerful labor union, the Brotherhood of Quinque-dimensional Engineers," Coal Bin continued, "I am authorized (smile) to offer you—in exchange for your turning over to us the daughter of King Croesus together with the aforementioned paraphernalia free (smile) transportation on board our time vessel to whenever and wherever you are from."

Robin stared at him.

"I have just returned from sixth-century Sardis," Coal Bin went on, "where (smile) for many days I have been sitting at the bargaining table with the king himself. I regret (smile) to report that we were unable to reach a mutually satisfactory agreement."

BARGAINING table? Agreement? Suddenly Robin understood why Coal Bin had chosen late twentieth-century English in which to conduct the conversation. Aside from the probability of Robin's being familiar with it, it abounded with generalities and provided the speaker with an ideal means of dignifying the lowliest of

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professions, of talking around the truth and of calling a spade a spade when it was really a shovel.

Coal Bin was far from the first to have elevated extortion to the level of the bargaining table. None of which explained why King Croesus has refused to come across with the ransom.

"Surely he must have offered you something for Manijeh's safe return," Robin said.

"He refused absolutely to recompense us in any way whatsoever for our labor."

Robin was stunned. "Did he say why?"

"He said (smile) that the piece of merchandise on which our bargaining power was based was of no use to him—that he already had in his possession a number of such commodities, that the commodity in question (smile) had negated through stubbornness and conceit several tentative conglomerate mergers with neighboring corporations and that chattel such as she, being non-negotiable, was of no further value to him. Thus (smile) our little labor union has been deprived of wages its members have honestly earned, necessitating our taking action to obtain whatever other income may be accruing (smile) to us."

"I can understand why you want Manijeh's jewelry," Robin said. "But why do you want her?"

"She will bring (smile) a handsome price on the Babylonian slave market. Meanwhile, you will have been suitably recompensed for your (smile) labors by means of a free voyage home. I might even offer you as an added inducement that small ring that twinkles (smile) so charmingly on her left little finger."

Robin took a deep breath. He managed to keep his temper, but it wasn't easy.

"No deal," he said.

Coal Bin blinked. "But I am unable (smile) to offer you more. Our union funds are virtually exhausted and must be replenished. Moreover (smile) you cannot but agree that both the girl and her paraphernalia are rightfully ours and that as the thief who stole them (smile) you are scarcely deserving of the recompense I proffered."

Again Robin managed to keep his temper. "Neither Manijeh nor her jewels belong to anyone but herself," he said.

Throughout the one-sided conversation Coal Bin had kept glancing at the time raft. Now he pointed to it.

"Surely you are not so naive as to think you can escape from the ISLE in that."

It was the last straw. "If you were working for me," Robin said icily, "I'd fire you in two seconds flat. You know why? I don't like the way you part your hair."

The freedom to part his hair any way he chose had long been the workingman's most cherished right, more important to him even

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than time-and-a-half. To question it was tanamount to heresy. Apparently matters hadn't changed in Coal Bin's day and age. His face went white, his equanimity vanished and he shook his fist.

"Dirty (smile) capitalist pig!" he shouted. "Robber of the Poor! Stealer (smile) from the mouths of babes! Picker of the hard-working man's (smile) pockets! Dirty—"

At this point his "fellow workers," realizing that something had gone drastically wrong at the bargaining table and fearful, perhaps, lest their president forget the presence of the fence, stepped forward, seized his arms and, leaving the two-way mike behind, carried him bodily off into Minos. There they disappeared among the rocks, where gradually Coal Bin's imprecations faded away.

ROBIN looked at Manijeh. Manijeh looked at him.

"What did he say to you, Ro-bin? What did you say to him?"

"He said they wanted your jewels. I said they couldn't have them."

"How can they be such pigs? They have already collected a huge ransom from my father, have they not?"

Robin didn't have the heart to tell her the truth. Besides, Coal Bin might have been lying. Suppose, though, he hadn't been? In that case would it be fair to Manijeh to take her back to Sardis and dump her off like so much unwanted baggage?

But if he didn't take her back to Sardis, what was he going to do with her? He couldn't leave her on the ISLE. He couldn't take her home. True, his father might like her, but it was a cinch his eight brothers and his ten sisters, all of whom lived in the Feeney homestead with their wives, husbands and children and all of whom were on welfare, wouldn't. All they'd have to do was take one look at her jewelry and that would be it.

He sighed. He couldn't remember a time when he had had so many troubles.

"I don't know whether they collected the ransom or not, Manijeh," he said. "We'll just have to wait and see. Meanwhile, we're going to have to work on the raft all day today and all night tonight so we can launch it early tomorrow morning. The sooner we leave this 'mountaintop,' the better."

She made no objection and after a quick breakfast they got busy. Manijeh had no mechanical aptitude whatsoever; nevertheless she always seemed to know which tool to hand him next and always managed to be where she should be when he needed her. Equally important, she now prepared all the meals, enabling him to make up for time he had previously lost.

Throughout the day he expected her kidnapers to show up again, but they did not. Coal Bin worried him.

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So did the time ship. The former had brains and the latter indubitably carried weapons of a far more sophisticated nature than cutlasses. He was certain that it was anchored just off Minos.

Clearly, however, Coal Bin knew nothing about magnetic fields—or he would have shorted out the fence at once. Thus, even if the ship carried gas grenades, lobbing one over the upper edge of the field—which was sixty feet high—and incapacitating Robin and his Girl Saturday, hardly would accomplish anything.

Tentatively Robin concluded that Coal Bin planned to make his move after Robin deactivated the fence himself and he and his Girl Saturday were on board the time raft and on their way to the sea. When the night passed without incident he knew this to be the case.

VI

BY DAWN'S early light the time raft was a phenomenon to behold.

Its launching wheels sported white sidewall belted tires and its main deck was completely enclosed. There were two port and two starboard windows, a wide forewindow just above the hooded prow and an even wider aftwindow just above the rear deck. All were equipped with safety glass and could be raised and lowered by means of little cranks. The cockpit was roomy and just behind it was a commodious compartment furnished with an upholstered divan on which Manijeh could sleep if she got tired during the voyage.

The time-drive ganglion was located in front of the pilot's seat, underneath the control panel, and the heavily insulated wires connecting it to the fore- and aft-equilator-bars and the port and starboard interometer-strips had been routed underneath the main deck. It was preset for sixth-century B.C. Sardis. All Robin would have to do when he and Manijeh reached the sea was turn off the launching motor and throw a switch.

The launching motor had been lifted intact from the Ford Torino. However, Robin had completely rebuilt it, increasing its HP and eliminating its noxious emissions—a true feat of legerdemain by twentieth-century standards, but child's play for a mechanic of his own day and age.

The prow was equipped with four prowlights—two on either side—and the stern with six sternlights—three on either side. There were two chronocane repellors—one centered on the forward equilator bar and the other on the aft equilator bar—that Robin had fashioned from a set of 1974 license plates he had found in the trunk of one of the used cars.

He and Manijeh took turns in the shower. Then they had a farewell breakfast at MacDougall's, packed

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a lunch and filled a gallon thermos with coffee. Manijeh insisted on preparing an extra batch of the "little biscuits" to take home to her sisters and day was breaking when they at last left the stand, walked over to the raft and got on board. There was still no sign of the uncouth ones but Robin suspected they had the Lot under observation, probably from the brow of Hill 29.

Presently the Lot resounded with the smooth rumble of the raft's 420 HP 8 cylinder emission-free internal-combustion launching motor. After driving over to the fuel pumps Robin filled the tank with regular, then drove over to the office and parked as close to the door as he could get. He went inside, pulled the fence cartridge fuse, ran outside and quickly reboarded the raft. After locking the port and starboard doors he surveyed the scene on all sides. Still no sign of the kidnapers.

HE DROVE off the Lot into King Arthur's Kingdom and began circling the base of Hill 29. The special fore and aft suspension system he had designed paid off and the raft rode the uneven terrain smoothly. But he had to be careful of hangups because of its low undercarriage—an unavoidable carry-over from the cars he had used for parts.

Presently he came to a lane and since it led in the direction he wanted to take, he turned into it. He was able to up the raft's speed. Beside him he heard Manijeh gasp.

"My father would give half his kingdom for a chariot such as this!" she exclaimed.

Robin concentrated on the road ahead, momentarily expecting the kidnapers to appear. He didn't think they would try to destroy the raft for the simple reason that Manijeh might be injured and her value on the Babylonian slave market impaired. But he did think they would try to disable it.

However, he saw no sign of them and presently he and Manijeh reached the Plain of Marathon—and the marsh.

The marsh extended from the eastern fringe of the Amerindian Forest to the base of Hill 29. He had been unaware of its existence because he hadn't passed that way before and because from a distance it looked no different from the rest of the terrain.

He drove the length of it just to make sure there was no way of crossing it. There wasn't.

The good old Feeney luck again.

"Why are we turning around?" Manijeh asked.

"We've got to find another way to get to Sardis. This one's out."

He expected a sardonic comment. Oddly none was forthcoming.

Coventry would be his best bet, even though it involved passing through the whole of Arthur's Kingdom. Fortunately he found a

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lane that roughly paralled the Amerindian Forest and skirted the higher ground where most of the grim-looking castles stood. But the lane didn't go all the way and the last leg of the journey was a nightmare of hills and dales that provided not even so much as cow-path. At length, however, he glimpsed buildings in the distance and knew they were going to make it.

He approached the town slowly. Its streets afforded the kidnapers an excellent chance to waylay them. But he needn't have worried—the streets proved to be so narrow that the raft couldn't pass through them, couldn't, in fact, even enter them.

Next, he tried *Yasnaya Polyana.* Getting there turned out to be another nightmare. Arriving, he found that wherever a route to the sea existed, trees had been felled to block it.

The kidnapers handiwork, of course. They, too, had worked all night and the field-fence had shut out the sound of their labors.

Somehow Robin managed to get back to the used-car lot. He knew he could never make the sea through Minos, so after fueling up again he drove the raft through the northwestern section of the place-time to Grendel Land. He found more nightmares awaiting him—roads barely wide enough to accommodate an oxcart, sodden fields, sullen hills, foreboding forests. In exploring the ISLE during his first two days as a castaway he had touched upon all the place-times, but he had seen them from the perspective of a man on foot and a man on foot sees the world far differently from a man on wheels.

After straddling a pair of deep ruts through a brooding woods, Robin came abreast of a large hall with antlerlike ornaments projecting from its gables. He had come across it on his previous visit and had identified it as Heorot, the *mise en scène* of Beowulf's legendary battle with the troll Grendel. It was mid-afternoon by this time, and if Manijeh had glanced once into the rear compartment where their lunch lay, she had done so a dozen times. At last he braked the raft in the shadow of the hall and, after a careful look around, got out.

"Would you like to have something to eat, Manijeh?"

She needed no second invitation. They ate standing up, utilizing the raft's hood as a picnic table. What little sunlight managed to penetrate the perpetual overcast that characterized Grendel Land's sky glittered harshly on her jewelry, all of which she had on, of course, and all of which she had polished to high heaven. As always, this annoyed him. Not that he begrudged her the wealth the jewels represented—he just didn't want it so frequently and flamboyantly thrown in his face.

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SHE was standing with her back toward one of the hall's apertures—a window, presumably. Abruptly a huge hand attached to a brawny arm shot out from the window and made a grab for her. Robin dove across the hood and pulled her out of reach just in time. He had a very bad moment during which he almost believed the hand and arm belonged to none other than Grendel himself—then, as the owner emerged from the window, he saw they were part and property of his old friend, the Good Samaritan.

Two more of the kidnapers emerged from two more windows and approached the raft.

Robin threw the rest of their coffee into the Good Samaritan's eyes, shoved Manijeh into the raft and locked her door. Then he shot around the raft, slid behind the wheel and closed and locked his door. Meanwhile the Good Samaritan was rubbing his eyes and dancing a jig in the middle of the rutted road. Robin was about to send the raft either over or around him and continue in the same direction he had been traveling when he saw that several trees had been felled ahead and deduced the presence of a roadblock.

Wearily he turned the raft around and headed back the way he had come.

The road might have taken him and Manijeh all the way to the shore and had constituted their last remaining hope. The strip of Grendel Land conterminous to Futureville and Minos was much too heavily forested for passage—and he wouldn't have tried to go through Futureville in any case. Even on an ISLE, travel could not postdate the energy-source of the time ship—in this instance, raft—and were he to have entered Futureville the raft would have come to a screeching halt and he and his Girl Saturday would have been worse off than before.

So it was back to the used-car lot again.

He sighed. He was reminded of a story he had heard once about a man who had built a boat in his attic and when it was finished could find no way of getting it downstairs and out of the house.

Throughout the return trip he had the uncomfortable feeling that he had eluded the Good Samaritan and his friends far too easily—that they hadn't really cared whether they captured him and Manijeh or not. They had behaved like three cats playing with two mice.

Where were the other six cats?

IN MINOS the raft became hung up on an outcropping and it took him better than two hours to work it free. Night had fallen when at last, tired, discouraged and disgusted, he drove into the lot. He pulled up in front of the office, turned off the launching motor,

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entered and, finding the field-fence adapter unharmed, reactivated the fence. Then he climbed back into the raft and settled down to think.

Manijeh had dozed off. Awakening, she said, "Why have we come back here again, Ro-bin?"

"To give me a chance to figure a way out of the fix we're in."

"Then you do not know how to get to Sardis after all?"

"I'm afraid not."

She was silent for a while. Then: "I am glad. I didn't really want to go home to my father from the very beginning."

Robin looked at her. "You didn't? Why?"

"Because he does not seem to know I am alive. All he cares about are his wives and concubines. In addition to them, he has a farm where he raises girls the way the peasants raise sheep. When he isn't thinking about his wives and concubines he is thinking about them."

"I'm afraid I'm going to have to take you back to him just the same," Robin said. "Provided I can find a way."

She nodded. "I know. Like all Mysian goatherds, you will do anything for riches. I hope he doesn't give you so much as a fig for bringing me back."

"Now see here—" Robin began.

"Your only interest in me from the beginning was my jewels," Manijeh went on. "And then, after you found out who my father was, your only interest in me was the reward. I know all about such things. Every time a prince looks at me I see either my jewels or my father's wealth shining in his eyes. That is why every time my fathers tries to arrange a marriage for me I hide in my room and barricade the door." She shuddered and a tear rolled down her cheek. "And you are just like they are, even though you are only a Mysian goatherd."

Robin was staring at the tear. It certainly seemed real enough. But he had no chance to find out for sure. All over the lot, which in his naivete he had assumed to be deserted, Buccannibillies, kidnapers, pirates were boiling out of used cars. Counting the Good Samaritan and his tow buddies—who had apparently outdistanced the raft—and Coal Bin, there were nine of them. Eight were brandishing cutlasses. The ninth, Coal Bin, was brandishing Robin's acetylene torch.

VII

—Think, Robinson Feeney said to himself. *Think...*

—What is an ISLE?

—An ISLE is an Integrated Superficial Lenticular Ephemeron.

—Yes, yes. But what is its relationship to conventional reality?

—It is a montage of place-times that have been lifted out of conventional reality and

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projected upon the surface of quinque-dimensional space.

—Then an ISLE is connected to conventional reality through each of its place-times, is it not? And there is, is there not, a sort of quinque-dimensional umbilical cord connecting each of the segments to its original?

—Yes. But the metaphor is misleading because it conjures up a three-dimensional image. Quinque-dimensionally the distance separating the two realities is both infinite and nonexistent. Thus the umbilical cord would have to be both visible and invisible, without end and without beginning.

—Nevertheless it would be possible, would it not, to proceed directly from a projected to an original reality?

—It might be possible—if the time-traveler overloaded his time-drive energizer and risked ruining it. But time-drive energizers cost a fortune and—

ROBIN drew himself up short. What was he arguing about? What difference did it make how much they cost? If burning his out would keep Manijeh out of the hands of Coal Bin and himself out of reach of cutlasses he couldn't ask for a better bargain. And he would never have to worry about replacing it—because where they were going he would not be able to replace it.

Rousing himself from his brown study, he saw that Manijeh had picked up a heavy-duty socket wrench from the deck and was shaking it in the face of Coal Bin, who was standing several feet from the raft's starboard hull trying to ignite the acetylene torch with what looked like a cigar lighter. But for some reason the lighter itself wouldn't ignite.

Robin started up the launching motor.

Excursion ships such as the *Long Long Age* steered clear of the late twentieth century, hence all his knowledge of the year 1974 A.D. was limited to what little he had read of the history of the period. But he had read enough to know that when he and his Girl Saturday got there—assuming they got there—the new problems that would confront them would be nearly as bad as the ones confronting them now.

Well, at least they would be different.

Coal Bin at last got the torch going, adjusted the flame and began applying it to the starboard door handle.

"Ro-bin, the wall is getting hot," Manijeh said. "I think we had better leave."

"We're going to, Manijeh—but by a different door."

He began backing the raft toward the nearest section of the field-fence. Coal Bin and his friends confident their quarry couldn't escape;

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walked easily along on either side of it. Coal Bin continued to apply the torch to the starboard door-handle, smiling at every other step.

Several feet from the fence Robin braked, then inched the raft backward till the aft equilator-bar came into contact with the magnetic field.

There was a loud *pfft...*, as the energy transfer began.

The "Buccannibillies" were visibly startled, but none of them—not even Coal Bin—caught on.

Not that it would have done them any good if they had.

Robin kept his eyes focused on the time-drive energizer indicator. It climbed rapidly. When it completed the circuit of the dial he turned off the launching motor.

"Here we go!" he said to his Girl Saturday and threw the ganglion switch.

AT FIRST nothing happened. Then, subtly, the figures outside the raft began to lose substance. So did Hill 29. So did Minos. So did MacDougall's. So did *Yasnaya Polvana*. So did King Arthur's Kingdom. Everyone and everything, in short—except Robin, Manijeh, the raft, the cars and the car lot—began to fade away.

Suddenly the cars that Robin had torn down for parts reappeared. He kept his fingers crossed. Now, if ever, the raft would dematerialize and he and Manijeh would be left sitting on thin air. When it did not he knew that time was more lenient than he had thought—it could and did permit the coexistence of two or more versions of the same object.

Buildings patterned with tiers of lighted windows had begun to take shape. Now people began to appear. Muffled traffic noises reached his and Manijeh's ears.

At length the Buccannibillies vanished altogether. So did the ISLE.

"Something is burning, Ro-bin," Manijeh said. "Do you not smell it also?"

It was the time-drive energizer, of course—or what was left of it. He rolled down the port window.

"It's nothing to be alarmed about, Manijeh."

He looked at the people standing in the lot, at the people passing in the street, on foot and in cars.

Well, here we are, he thought. *Babes in the late twentieth-century woods...*

He removed his jacket and told Manijeh to put it on before someone saw her jewels and tried to steal them.

"Where are we, Ro-bin?" she asked. "Certainly this is not Sardis—or even Lydia."

"We're in a strange country, Manijeh—a country filled with fierce savages. But don't worry. Most of them won't attack us—at least not openly—because they like to pretend they're civilized."

"I'm not worried. I am with you."

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Him? A fat lot of good he could do her. No job. No money in his pocket. She had sure picked a good one to pin her hopes on when she picked him!

Most of the people in the lot were looking at the used cars. Presently one of the ones who wasn't—a big beefy man with salt-and-pepper sideburns—noticed the raft for the first time. His eyes got as big as beer coasters. He came over and rested his elbow on the port window sill.

"Hi, folks—didn't happen to see you drive in. Thinking of trading her in?"

"Trading who in? Robin asked.

"I'll make you a generous allowance. After all, that's how I got my name."

It got through to Robin finally that the man was referring to the time raft.

"You drive out of here in one of my later models and I'll go as high as two thousand bucks," Generous George continued. "And believe me, that's tops for an old crate that needs a paint job as bad as this one. What make is it, by the way?"

Robin stared at him. *Two thousand dollars for a burned-out time raft?*

"I asked you—what make is it?" Generous George repeated.

"I made it myself," Robin said.

"G'wan—"

During the conversation, another twentieth-centuryite character—a tall, middle-aged man wearing a sleek blue business suit—had been walking around the raft, looking at it from this angle and that. Now, apparently having overheard Robin's last words, he came over to the port window and asked, "You built this yourself?"

Obviously awed, Generous George retired hastily into the background.

"Well not exactly," Robin amended. "I had a helper."

"How many horse?"

"Four-twenty."

The tall man blinked. Then: "You must be polluting the environment like crazy. How the devil do you get away with it?"

"I don't get away with it. I installed a simple afterburner that eliminates pollution entirely."

"I suppose you built that too."

"Naturally. Like to take a look at it?"

"I haven't time right now," the tall man said. He handed Robin a card. "I'm staying at the Wenceslaus Arms across the street—that's how I happened to get my eye on this job. Drop in tomorrow morning and we'll have a chat. Maybe you're pulling my leg and maybe you're not—we'll see. If you're not and you can design a car for us like this one and simultaneously free us from the Curse of the Wankel—our engineering department is shortly going to grow a new head."

The tall man turned and left the lot.

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ROBIN felt a little better, but not much. He had a good prospect of getting a job, but he still didn't have any money. Down the street from the hotel he could see the lighted show-window of what undoubtedly was a pawnshop. If only. . .

Scandalized, he threw the nascent thought out of his mind. What in the world was the matter with him? Had he no pride left at all? Besides, Manijeh would never go along with the idea—never in a million years.

He became aware that she was looking at him intently. "Have you ever visited this strange land before, Ro-bin?" she asked.

"No. But I know a little bit about it."

"One time when I was a little girl I became lost in a strange part of Sardis. No one would give me anything to eat nor would anyone offer me a place to sleep. A long time later I found out why."

He felt her hand touch his, felt something cold drop into his palm. Looking down, he saw the gleam of an emerald earring.

"When I said all you wanted was my jewels," Manijeh went on, "I said it because I thought you were still going to take me to Sardis and I was angry. I know that you do not want them—that you never did. I know also that you are not really a Mysian goatherd, but I think that you may be as poor as one. It is imperative therefore that you exchange this bauble for whatever is needed to obtain for us food and shelter and clothing."

"Now see here—" Robin began.

"But even though you may not be a Mysian goatherd," Manijeh continued, "your apparel makes you look like one and it would never do for the daughter of King Croesus to be seen in the company of so uncouth a creature, especially when the means for him to alter his appearance are available."

"All right, I *will* exchange it," Robin said and jammed the earring into his pocket.

Then he saw that she was still looking at him, that there was a twinkle in her amber eyes.

Was it possible that this Girl Saturday knew him even better than he knew her?

"Suppose I really were a Mysian goatherd," he said. "Suppose I couldn't alter my appearance. What would the daughter of King Croesus' reaction be to that?"

"Way down in her heart she wouldn't care a fig."

His Girl Saturday moved closer to him on the seat—so close that her hair touched his cheek. He put his arm around her and drove out into the twentieth-century night. It was spring and the streetlights shone softly on the sidewalks and the stores. A breeze born of fields and flowers was blowing up from the south.

The good old Feeney luck, it would seem, had taken a turn for the better. ★

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Any man can find a comet—but it takes a woman to lose one!

FUTURE FORBIDDEN

PHILIP LATHAM

DAGNY'S policy for romance in married love was as deceptively simple (and successful) as the Bank of England's policy in finance: *Never apologize. Never explain.* As Bob (Dr. Robert Archer) had discovered long ago, verbal combat with his wife was simply energy wasted upon the

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suburban air. How could she explain something to him when she couldn't explain it to herself? Equally futile was his trying to withhold a secret. Given sufficient time she would always know. And Dagny had worlds of time.

It was early evening when Bob finally pulled in to his driveway. Dagny was feeding Margarit, their ginger cat. The two identified in many respects. They functioned by intuition, a means of perception much superior to ratiocination. Raising the lid on a tin of catfood, or opening a carton of milk, caused Margarit to materialize—sometimes, it seemed, from thin air.

Usually Bob was able to make the two hundred miles from Mount Elsinore by late afternoon. But the unexpected arrival of a Nobel prize winner at the observatory and the subsequent time required for Bob's plates to dry, had delayed him. The Nobel prize winner he had managed finally to brush off. But his plates had been a different matter—he didn't like forced drying. Furthermore, he hadn't wanted anyone fooling with those particular plates but himself.

But at last—after twelve consecutive days and nights of exclusively masculine company on Mt. Elsinore—he was free and dirty and glad to see Dagny. Especially glad.

She deserted Margarit and followed him upstairs while he was having a shower and shave. Upon emerging from the bathroom he found her examining a slip of yellow paper in his record book.

Suddenly she exclaimed. *"Diabolique!"*

Dagny was native Russian but had moved early to Paris, where she had appeared professionally on the stage. Bob read French and could understand and speak it fairly well. This time she might as well have spoken in Russian, which he understood not at all. He leaped at her, snatched the paper from her nerveless grasp.

"Oh, god!" he cried. "To think you should have seen!"

"And why should I not have?"

"Because this is top secret—"

"So, scientists also have their secrets?"

Dagny, in her capacity as Official Witch of California, often received cryptic messages from fellow mystics. Occasionally it had been Bob's misfortune to have to take such calls. He faithfully recorded them, read them back, then passed the nonsense on to his wife without comment. He knew he could expect no reciprocity.

He stuffed the paper into his dressing gown. "Who said this was science?"

"What is it, then?"

He averted his face, scowling darkly. "Interpol. Mafia. Eskimo connection in Greenland."

"Robert, you are in danger?"

"It's nothing—nothing."

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"They threaten you?"

Robert shrugged. To girls who liked him he was Robert, never Bob.

"I shall bewitch them," Dagny declared. "Destroy them with the blood of a lamb."

"Be kind of difficult, wouldn't it? Seeing you're a vegetarian."

"Perhaps a black turnip—"

Bob did a sudden changeover. His secret had to come out.

"Darling, forget the lamb's blood and the turnip. I might as well tell you—you've just discovered a new comet. Comet Dagny. This message is just the regular astronomical code for announcing a new object's position.

He smoothed out the crumpled yellow sheet.

DAGNEY COMET ARCHER 19501
30317 504— 22376 11716 -1124
20114 20001 75549 35216
ELSINORE

Dagny was completely bewildered.

"I discovered a comet? But who said so—"

Bob tapped his chest.

"I said. *Moi.* Me. That guarantees it will bear your name."

"You found it and named it for me? But how wonderful!"

Bob shook his head regretfully.

"Sorry, darling, but discovering a new comet doesn't amount to much. Anybody can find one—just by looking long enough."

"I still think it's wonderful."

"I didn't really discover it. Found it purely by accident. Thought I'd take a look at Mercury. Been several reports of conspicuous markings on the terminator. While we were getting set I spotted this fuzzy object. Looked suspicious. Managed to get a couple of plates before sunrise. No doubt about it—comet all right."

"Comet Dagny?"

Bob smiled wistfully.

"Other men give their wives and girl friends mink coats and diamonds. Me? Best I can do is a comet."

"My comet? We can see it?"

"Don't know. Probably not."

Bob opened his record book and did some rapid figuring.

"Hm—might at that. If my preliminary orbit's any good—which it probably isn't—this thing's pretty bright for an object beyond Mars. Ought to be down around magnitude sixteen by sixth power law. I'd say it's thirteen easy."

He took some dozen five-by-seven plates from his suitcase, each plate enclosed in a heavy manila envelope. He arranged them in chronological order, then stowed them away in his bottom dresser drawer.

"Comet Dagny," he said with some satisfaction, "safe and secure with my socks and shorts."

"But in the sky?"

"Somewhere in Aquarius the Waterbearer, I think. Mean

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anything in your astrology?"

Although Dagny had had no formal training in astronomy, from astrology she had learned the meaning of such elementary terms as right ascension and declination, hour angle, ecliptic, node, perihelion, etc.

She thought a moment before answering.

"I'd have to know where it's going first."

"General direction of Earth right now," he said carelessly.

He slipped into his bathrobe.

"Ah, does this old room look good," he sighed. "After that pad on the mountain." Then, at sight of Dagny's face: "Hey, what's the matter?"

Suddenly the light dawned.

"Oh, lord, I'll bet you've been seeing science-fiction films again! Don't you know that in popular science *every* comet, asteroid or thing-from-outside is inevitably heading straight for the Earth? Object coming closer. Situation growing desperate. President calls emergency cabinet meeting. Secretary of Education and Indian Affairs goes on TV. Keep calm. Have faith. Government has situation well in hand."

Dagny looked doubtful.

"Oh, hell, why did I ever mention it?" he muttered impatiently. He turned to a sheet in his record book. "See this sketch? The comet's path based on my parabolic orbit. *N* marks the ascending node. Circle's the Earth. You can see there's no chance of collision."

He fell back on the bed.

"For two weeks I've been working my head off on that damn mountain. Worst part about that clean ascetic life is you get to feeling so good. So good sometimes you can hardly stand it."

He drew Dagny down beside him.

"There's a comjunction coming up all right," he told her. "But not with any comet."

DAGNY was a witch. If you had asked her she would have said so in the same matter-of-fact way she might have admitted to being a librarian or registered nurse. There was no secret about it. After her appointment as Official State Witch, of course, no secret was possible.

Bob and Dagny were "sexually compatible" and otherwise "mutually well adjusted," as the marriage counselors euphemistically phrase it. On one point, however, they differed profoundly. Bob was a professional astronomer, a man devoted to what he could observe and measure. As he was fond of pointing out: no theory can ever *explain*. At most it can only *describe*.[1] Bob was also a romantic, but a romantic with both feet on the ground.

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(1) The noted physicist, Ernest Mach (1838-1916), believed scientists must exclude elements not perceived by the senses in arriving at their results.

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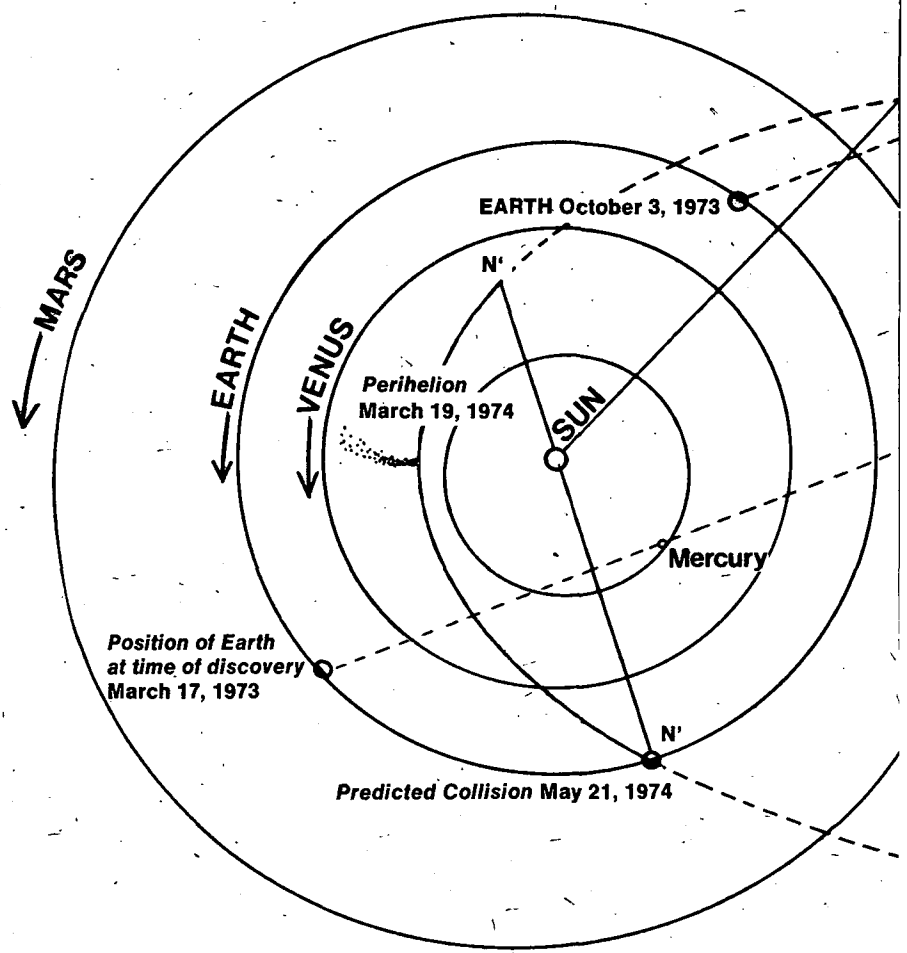
A Diagram Of Events Most Interesting To Dr. Archer And His Bewitching Wife



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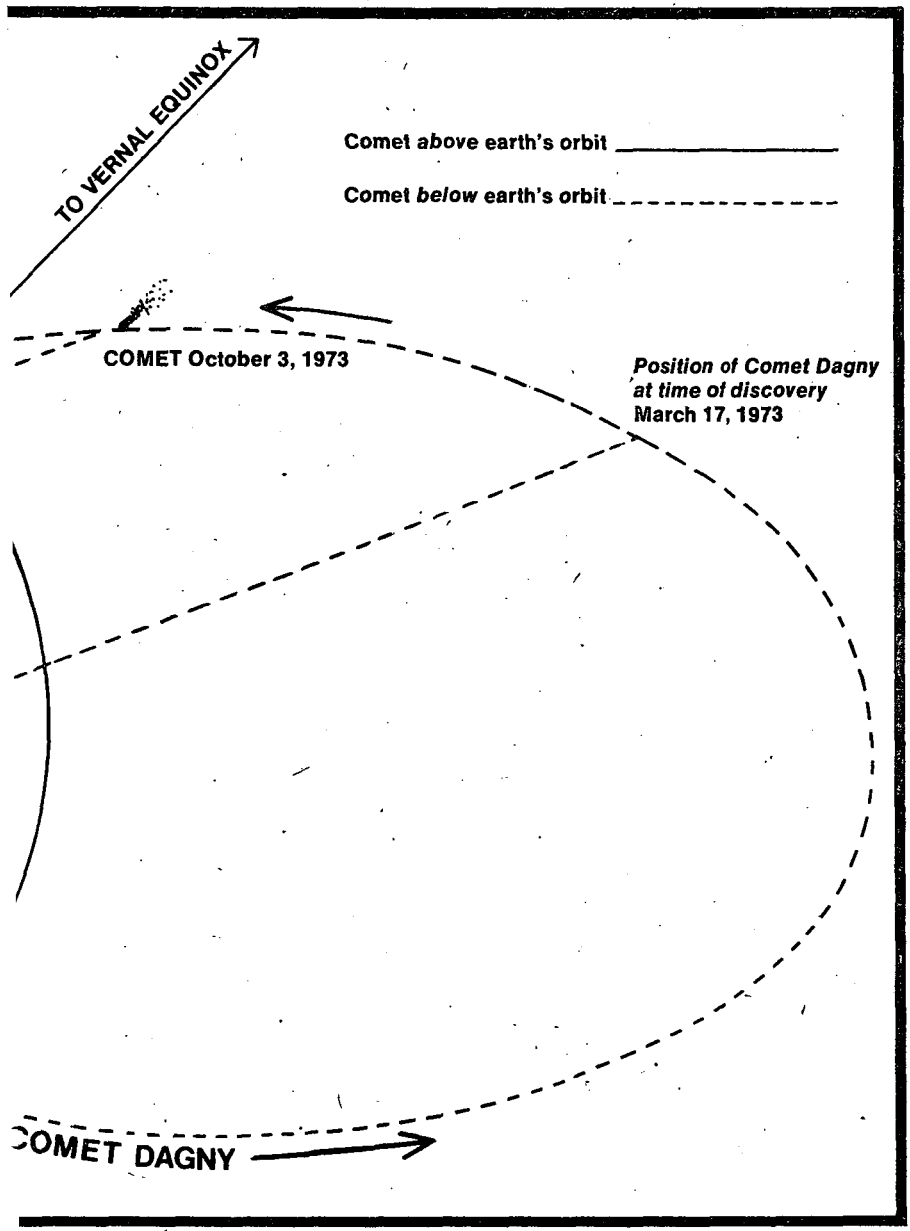

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Dagny, on the other hand, was a mystic, a believer in astrology, parapsychology and occultism. Strangely enough, there had never been any problem. Long ago they had taken a solemn vow to respect each other's opinions. Bob shrugged off Dagny's mysticism. Dagny accepted Bob's forthright pragmatism. It was that simple.

Then, too, there was the very special nature of Dagny's witchcraft. She had nothing but scorn for the famous witches of old. Their powers were feeble, confined principally to graveyards and unrentable houses. Who ever heard of Medea beyond the Aegean Sea? Had Morgan Le Fey ever made the headlines in Hindustan?

Dagny maintained that witchcraft—truly valid witchcraft—had no bounds. The speed of light is finite—that of thought, infinite. Hence witchcraft, if good in Haiti, should likewise be good in New York, on Mars or in the Andromeda galaxy, it made no difference. She agreed with Conan Doyle that "A devil with merely local powers like a parish vestry would be too inconceivable a thing."[2]

Certain practical expressions of Dagny's prowess as a witch had to do with the fact that she had never stopped acting. It was the fragile "Marguerite Gautier," *The Lady of The Camelias,* who beguiled the butcher into giving her an extra choice cut of steak. It was "Lady Macbeth" who prodded the landlord into repairing the roof.

Occasionally she took part in some little theater production in their neighborhood. Bob wished she wouldn't. Her "Laura" in Strindberg's *The Father* had made "Martha" in *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* look like a Sunday-school teacher at a wienie bake.

BOB knew his preliminary parabolic orbit would be useless for prediction after a few weeks. But to improve the orbit he had to extend the arc. And to extend the arc he needed additional observations.

To those unfamiliar with the operation of a large observatory this would seem easy enough. Just take the telescope and get them. But the observing time of a large telescope is jealously guarded, carefully rationed out to the various staff members according to their special needs, weeks in advance. Bob was all too well aware of the futility of requesting observing time for such an insignificant object as a comet. His only hope of getting more plates was to find some big-hearted individual who would squeeze him in for a few minutes. Bob had done such favors for others often enough. But he was forced to go from office to office as a suppliant, begging for that precious intangible quantity known as time.

"Be glad to oblige, but—"

(2) *The Hound of the Baskervilles.*

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"Sure sorry, Bob, but—"

"Remember how you saved my life once, but—"

Others simply shook their head or gave him a stony stare.

Of course, Mt. Elsinore was not the only possibility. Bob's wire to the Central Bureau for Astronomical Telegrams, Cambridge, Massachusetts, had been broadcast to observatories all over the world. His comet was so near the sun, however, and so correspondingly difficult to observe that he doubted if any astronomers would care to make the effort. Time went on and on until Bob was forced to write Comet Dagny off as lost.[3]

Then, one morning, wholly unexpected good news came in the form of a hand-written letter from his old professor of Celestial Mechanics, Dr. William P. Killigrew, Director of the Killigrew Observatory, Dunedin, New Zealand. Not only was Dr. Killigrew the director of the institution that bore his name—he was also its entire observing staff, chief of public relations, science head and janitor. Its 12-inch Schmidt photographic being his own personal property, he could use it however and whenever he chose. The result was a dozen perfectly good positions of Comet Dagny extending the arc over another two months.

The new positions wrought some radical surgery on the orbit of Comet Dagny. The parabola was forced into a closed ellipse of orbital period 3.375 years, the shortest of any comet except Encke's.[4] A close brush with Jupiter had effected the shift.

Comet Dagny still missed Earth by a wide margin at the ascending node, *N*, where it "surfaced" from below to above the Earth's orbital plane. Bob had not earlier been much concerned about *N'*, where Dagny ducked underground again. Now it was a jolt to him to discover that *N'* fell precisely on the Earth's orbit.

This fact alone, of course, did not mean that Earth and comet were doomed to collide. To collide, both bodies must arrive at *N'* simultaneously, a most improbable event. Yet a hurried calculation showed the comet had an excellent chance of scoring a hit.

Should he tell Dagny? He was undecided. He felt the truth never hurt anyone. And Dagny was not easily alarmed. The other side of the coin had to do with a direct blow to his ego—after his caustic remarks anent popular science writings and cosmic collisions. Furthermore, should the comet

(3) The Astronomical Society of the Pacific annually awards a gold medal to each discoverer of an unexpected comet. Ironically, the A.S.P. ran out of funds for gold medals the month Bob discovered Comet Dagny.

(4) Comet Wilson-Harrington of 1949 has a period of 2.31 years, but it has been observed at one appearance only and its orbit not well determined.

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miss—as it doubtless would by a small margin—he would have himself look ridiculous a second time. But ego satisfaction should have no place in science.

Then he got another idea.

FEW places on Earth can boast of such quick scenic changes as the great and tangled network of highways in southern California. Keeping an eye on one's surroundings while driving through is like watching a revolving stage. Start from the Los Angeles city hall. Head north toward the mountains. At the foothills follow the white line leading to Mt. Elsinore and at about 4000 feet park at some convenient wide turnout. Now you are in another world.

The time? Nine o'clock on a cool clear evening in October.

"Suppose we use that rock as our base of operations," Bob said, opening the car door. "You go sit down. I'll bring the lunch basket and blanket."

He waited until Dagny had reached the rock, then switched off the lights and stumbled after her. Dagny began scanning the sky immediately. Bob was more interested in the lunch basket.

Dagny was frankly disappointed.

"The comet, it is there?"

"Some place in Aquarius—its got to be." He came up with a couple of sandwiches. "Which would you rather have—cheese or tuna?"

"I see it!" Dagny cried. She grabbed Bob's arm. "There—over that pine tree."

Bob followed her gaze. The stars of Aquarius are faint and form no easily recognizable pattern. Bob, like most professional astronomers, was familiar only with the brighter constellations.

"That's her all right. Comet Dagny, a new female in the sky, along with Cassiopeia and Virgo and Queen Berenices' Hair."

Detail began coming out in the newcomer as their night vision sharpened. Bob found Dagny's hand under the laprobe. He wondered—how many men since the world began could boast of such an experience? The woman he loved the most by his side and her counterpart in the sky.

The comet did not correspond to the popular image of a comet, a hairy star with a beautiful long streaming tail. Instead it was an elongated blob with a stubby tail like a manx cat.

"It has no tail," said Dagny, disappointed.

"Sure it has. Sticking out behind it away from the sun." He scrutinized the celestial Dagny with a critical eye. "Wish there were a nice sharp nucleus in that big white coma. Makes it hard to get accurate positions."

"White?" Dagny asked. "Looks pale green to me, like something from the sea."

Bob turned his head slightly,

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trying to glimpse the comet by averted vision.

"It is pale greenish, isn't it? Probably emission from the Swan[5] bands of carbon. The C_2 molecule emits all through the spectrum, especially strong in the green." He chuckled. "Reason why women find candlelight so flattering. Emission from the Swan bands."

They watched the comet until it began to merge with the branches of a pine. Dagny drew the laprobe closer. A chill wind was coming up from the west.

"Maybe we'd better be going," said Bob. "Must be getting on toward midnight."

They returned to the car. Bob drove carefully, as if lost in thought, his eyes fixed on the white line winding ahead.

"Imagine," said Dagny, "people fearing anything so beautiful."

Bob did not reply.

PREDICTED instant of perihelion passage for Comet Dagny was 1974, Tuesday, March 19d 13h 13m 47s UT = J.D. 2442126.05124. Perihelion passage is a critical date for astronomers—it serves as a check on their calculations. Bob grew increasingly restless and abstracted with its approach. Not that anything particularly spectacular was expected: Comet Dagny was not a sungrazer like Ikeya-Seki of 1965, although it very probably would be visible in full daylight. Perihelion occurred as anticipated and was widely recorded.

By April Bob was going around in a daze. So completely had he identified with the comet that it had become more real than the world around him. Dagny appeared not to notice. She did not complain. She did not comment. She asked no questions. She had undergone such ordeals before. They always passed.

Then came a rainy evening in early April when Bob found his wife completely transformed. Gone was the quiet creature lolling on the chaise longue by the fireside. Dagny made a point of always dressing for dinner. She cared nothing for fashion. Her taste ran to the thin transparent white Empire style gown of the early 1800s. Bob was scarcely past the door before she swung him around the room, her eyes shining, her voice husky, seductive:

The little apples man entice
Since first they were in Paradise.
I feel myself with pleasure glow
That such within my garden grow. . .

He was not as startled as might have been supposed. He had experience with Dagny's moods.

"Hey, let me get my coat off," he

(5) Named after Sir Joseph Wilson Swan (1828-1914), who first described this series of bands from violet to red. The nature of the emitting molecule was long in doubt.

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mumbled, trying to break loose. "I'm all wet."

Dagny fell back on the chaise, gasping and laughing. Bob mixed himself a drink and perched on the other end.

"Why all the merriment?" he inquired.

Dagny poured it out.

She had received an invitation from the International Grand Coven to attend its annual meeting during the last half of April in Bucharest. Owing to the rising interest in occultism, the IGC for the first time in its stormy history had wound up the year with a substantial surplus in its treasury. A special tour of Transylvania, the Dracula country, had been arranged. Grand climax was to be a performance of the Walpurgis Night scene from *Faust,* with Dagny playing Lilith, young witch "fair beyond compare."

"It's to be a real professional production with exotic costumes and special lighting effects," she ran on, unable to restrain her enthusiasm. "And guess what? They're paying all our expenses!"

"Sounds wonderful," Bob agreed, regarding his empty glass. "Sorry to be so late. Began raining and the windshield wiper wouldn't work."

Dagny surveyed him steadily.

"So it started to rain? And the windshield wiper wouldn't work?" Her eyes never left his face. "That is all you have to say?"

"I said it was wonderful."

"Nothing else?"

"I'm very happy for you."

"Robert."

"Yes?"

"What is wrong?"

"Wrong? Nothing's wrong."

"Oh, I have known for months. Ever since that night on the mountain."

BOB had thought his wife could no longer surprise him. Now he had some doubts. There was an elegance about her at this moment, that compelling elegance which comes to some women after thirty and is born of absolute assurance in their poise and beauty.

"Madame Récamier," he said, grinning feebly.

He tried to turn away but her eyes refused to let him go. She had learned the art of catching the attention of an audience and holding it to some purpose, it seemed.

"Lose your slippers?" he said, glancing around the floor. "Your feet are bare."

"So were Madame Récamier's."

"That so? I never noticed."

"Robert, what is wrong?"

Bob reached for his glass.

"No!"

There was a long silence. Two minutes can be a long silence.

"This Grand Coven meeting," he began, "suppose it didn't happen."

"But I have the letter."

"I didn't mean that."

"No? What did you mean?"

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"I meant—well, things occur that you can't control." He stood for several minutes, feet apart, head bowed. Suddenly he looked at her again. "Comet Dagny will strike the Earth. No doubt about it. Point of contact near Hawaiian Islands. Epoch is 23h 19m UT of May 21."

"But that's after the meeting," said Dagny.

Bob stared.

"You mean you'd go ahead with this witchcraft thing? With such a menace from outer space on the way? It's a big comet. No telling what may happen. Thousands—millions of people may die."

Dagny shrugged.

Bob was listening intently. He strode to one of the windows, cupping his hands against the glass.

"Come outside. Something I want you to see."

Then when she failed to stir: "Well, move!" he shouted. "Quick! *Vite! Stat!*"

They stepped out to the portecochere. The rain had stopped. The stars were dancing in the darkening sky. Bob seized Dagny by the shoulders and whirled her around to face a red glow low in the west.

"See that?" he demanded. "That's Comet Dagny."

"But Comet Dagny is green."

"Red now," he said gently.

They reentered the house. Bob threw another log on the fire. Dagny leaned back on the chaise longue absently stroking Margarit.

"Why red?" she asked.

"Hard to explain in a few words," Bob said. "Comet's so much nearer the sun than when we saw it last October. Gases in the coma get so hot the molecules are torn apart into atoms. And oxygen atoms, for instance, emit red rays not ordinarily observable. 'Forbidden' rays we call them."

"'Forbidden?'" asked Dagny. "*Tabou?*"

"Not absolutely forbidden. Rather—just highly improbable, let's say. So improbable that ordinarily we never see them." Bob hesitated, trying to think of a good analogy. "You might compare the oxygen atoms to a guy in a busy office trying to write a tough report. He can't get started because he's always being interrupted. So he switches to the graveyard shift. Now—no visitors or phone calls. He works straight through. Same principle applies to the oxygen atoms out in the vacuum of space. They're undisturbed and able to emit the red rays ordinarily too feeble to be observed." He smiled wryly. "Nice symbolism too. First comet's green—SAFETY. Red now—DANGER AHEAD."

THEY sat for a long time gazing into the flames. Only Margarit kept on busily with her elaborate washing ritual.

Dagny spoke first.

"You said collision was impossible?"

"I said too much," Bob admitted.

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"That was way back in the Palaeozoic and was based on my parabolic orbit. Entirely new heresy now. Here, let me show you." He went to his overcoat, extracted a roll of paper which he spread out between them. "This oval's the orbit of Comet Dagny. Circle's the Earth's orbit, with Earth like a marble rolling around on top. The broken line shows where comet is moving below the Earth's orbit. Smooth line is where comet is moving above. This point, *N*, is the ascending node, where comet 'surfaces,' or moves from below to above plane of the Earth's orbit. Way off from Earth's orbit. Couldn't possibly have a collision. But look here at *N'*, the descending node, where the comet dives under again. Falls smack on Earth's path. Dammit, never carried my preliminary orbit far as descending node."

He gazed morosely at the offending point, *N'*.

"Of course, can't be a collision unless comet and Earth reach *N'* together. Highly improbable situation. But as it happens they will meet—right to the second. Like that traffic light I always hit on red."

Such a one-in-a-million chance apparently didn't strike Dagny as so remarkable—she was familiar with the traffic light Bob had mentioned.

"Peut-être que oui," she murmured.

"Oh, we'll survive it," Bob assured her. "More crackpot ideas floating around! One they're pushing the hardest is a comet intercept probe. Looks pretty promising. We launch a rocket equipped with a thermonuclear warhead, probably some time in April. We've already got the necessary instrumentation. The rocket zeros in on the comet. No chance for a miss. We give the command, warhead detonates, and comet's destroyed in a mass of bomb plasma."

"Comet Dagny—destroyed?"

"Afraid so. Arguments in favor are pretty strong. Nothing involved we haven't done before. They estimate fifty pounds of contaminant—"

"Never!"

Gone was the languid Madame Récamier. In her place was a defiant, imperious Saint Joan.

"Well, I'm resisting it," Bob hastened to add. "But then, hell, who ever listens to me?"

"It is I, Dagny, Official Witch of California, who speaks," she declared. "This collision is forbidden."

In previous crises Bob had discovered an attitude of passive nonopposition brought the best results. This time, however, he felt compelled to remonstrate.

"Remember, this orbit isn't any of my scribbling. It's based on data fed into a CDC 6600 computer with an n-body code. We took every

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possible gravitational force into account. Always with the same result—collision."

"No!"

"You still persist?"

Dagny replied with superb assurance, "Yes. In spite of everything."

Days passed.

The comet came on.

BOB took his coffee upstairs to watch the launching. Dagny refused to witness the disgraceful spectacle. Aside from giving Margarit an extra helping of gourmet cat food at twenty cents per fifteen-ounce can, she went about her household tasks exactly as usual.

"Well, perfect launching," Bob announced, joining Dagny at the breakfast table. "Funny thing," he remarked reflectively. "Folks have been scared of comets for centuries. First time we ever took a shot at one."

Dagny did not appear amused. Bob decided not to press the subject. He glanced through the paper. Along with dire predictions should the mission fail, there was the usual routine list of floods, murders, hijackings, etc. Considerable space was devoted to a new outbreak of Exotic Newcastle disease, which threatened to double the price of eggs. (Associated in some obscure way with the onset of the comet.)

He laid aside the paper, poured more coffee, was about to comment on some household chore, then decided this was a situation demanding the direct approach. He went to his wife, put his arms around her, and kissed her. It was not a peck. It was a kiss.

"Don't take it so hard. Periodic comets generally peter out after a while. How much better a heroic end than a slow lingering death. Think! Comet Dagny will be a landmark in astronomy. Remembered in the annals of science as long as science itself."

Such intimations of immortality gave no consolation. As remarked earlier, Dagny already had worlds of time.

SLOW fade to ten-second blackout during Bob's last impassioned outburst. Lights up revealing a nation, in home and cocktail bar, immobile, spellbound, awaiting the moment of truth. An expectant hush hangs over all. Only occasionally is the silence broken by the pop of beer cans and crackle of potato chips. All eyes are fixed, center screen, on the gleaming cylinder, hanging virtually motionless against the background of stars.

Flashback to mission control.

"The Space Intercept is now at rendezvous position with Comet Dagny."

But where was Comet Dagny? Millions of cubic AUs without a comet in sight.

The Comet Intercept was in the

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awkward situation of a rookie football player assigned to take out a certain opponent. He arrives at the designated position ready to carry out his assignment. Only his opponent isn't there. What to do?

Mission control after solemn deliberation decided to fire the warhead anyhow. Slow fadeout on $20,000,000 of bomb plasm.

Bob blamed it all on the stupid technologists in charge of operations. Never did trust those guys. No imagination. Well, wait till May 21, the predicted date of collision. But the Earth passed the comet's descending node without incident, not even a piffling little meteor shower.[6]

A few billion beings breathed easier. There was much celebrating in the streets.

Soothsayers and the astrology-struck promptly began making fun of science and its predictions.

EVENING of the day following the descending node. Dagny and Margarit reclining on the chaise before the fire. Bob restlessly pacing the room.

"Not the first time a comet's disappeared," he muttered. "Good evidence some comets are affected by nongravitational forces—Honda-Mrkos-Pajdusakova—Giacobina-Zinner. 'Erratics' we call them. But Comet Dagny's the first one that ever pulled a vanishing act right in front of us."

"Is it really so important?" Dagny said, absently stroking Margarit.

"It is to astronomers."

"But why?"

"Because it violates all our established laws of motion, that's why. Time and again we have questioned Newton's laws. Invariably the deviations have been traced to errors in observation or computation.[7] They survive the test of the experimental method. Not like astrology and that crap."

He flung himself on the chaise, his head in Dagny's lap.

"I'm sorry. Forgive me. Forgot our vow."

"You're so agitated about how comets go," Dagny said, after a pause. "Tell me, Robert, how do comets *come?*"

Bob pulled himself together with a masterful effort.

"That's harder than telling a kid how babies come. Why, the stork brings them. They find them on a rose bush or cabbage plant. As for comets—'they come from the everywhere into here.' "

He hesitated, trying to collect his scattered senses.

"Well, seriously, explanation most in favor is Jan Oort's comet

(6) An observer at the meteorological station, Kodaikanal, India, reported an unusually bright mock sun or sun dog.

(7) Bob, in his agitated state of mind, neglected the slight deviations due to general relativity.

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cloud hypothesis. He postulates a spherical shell surrounding the solar system 30,000 to 100,000 astronomical units thick. Comets originate from condensations in shell. A comet starts creeping toward the solar system. After millions of years finally makes it. Whisks around the Sun and heads back into deep space.

"Occasionally one like Comet Dagny has a close encounter with Jupiter. Poor thing's trapped. Its becoming a short-period ellipse like an asteriod's. All clear?"

Bob relapsed into gloomy silence. Margarit yawned.

"This comet cloud," said Dagny, "it forms how?"

"Easiest answer is by catastrophe. Body revolving between Mars and Jupiter blows up. Don't ask me why. Part escapes to the stars. Part goes to form the comet cloud."

"You have observed it?"

"Hell, no. We put it there."

"Ah, then you are like Margarit."

"Margarit?" Bob gave that ginger feline a suspicious glance. "How'd Margarit get into this?"

"You think your comets come from this cloud. Margarit thinks her food comes from tin cans. Why? Somebody put it there."

Bob pondered.

"Yeah, I get the point."

"Margarit sees me open a can. Out comes her food. She sees me open a cardboard carton. Out comes her milk. It always works. It's a law that never fails. Of course," Dagny said, "the creature's viewpoint is rather limited."

"Yeah, so's ours."

"I wonder," Dagny mused, "how many of our other ideas on life and the universe are equally limited? We think we peer so deep. But who can say? If we peered deeper might not we find a wholly new universe, utterly mysterious and incomprehensible?"

"Dagny, do you peer deeper? Is that what you're telling me?"

"Most cats, even, peer deeper. They discover mice—and thus seem sorcerers to such felines as our Margarit."

Bob gravely addressed the slumbering cat.

"Margarit, some day you and I will have a long talk about that." He rubbed her ear. She purred appreciatively.

"Little witch, I did hear you ban the collision. But surely you're not silly enough to. . ." Her proud stare stopped him. He could guess her thoughts. *Don't apologize. Don't explain.*

They both chuckled.

Then his jaw set firmly.

"But don't get me wrong. I'm still sticking with my same old stodgy ideas. All I believe is what I can observe and measure."

"Quand même?"

He nodded.

"In spite of everything." ★

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GALAXY BOOKSHELF

Theodore Sturgeon

BOOKS REVIEWED

The Science Fiction Hall of Fame
Volume Two A
Volume Two B
Ed. Ben Bova
Doubleday, $9.95 each

The Astounding/Analog Reader
Volume One
Ed. Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss
Doubleday, $7.95

The Overlords of War
Gerard Klein
Translated by John Brunner
Doubleday, $5.95

The Phaeton Condition
Douglas R. Mason
G. P. Putnam's Sons, $5.95

Bad Moon Rising
Ed. Thomas Disch
Harper and Row, $6.95

The Best From Galaxy
Volume One
Award, 95¢

I'VE some big ones for you this time: Big to have and to hold, tall on the horizons of both sf and this still-new year. First and biggest: *The Science Fiction Hall of Fame,* in not one, but two big beautiful volumes, each $9.95—and before you wince at the price, look what your double sawbuck gets you: to quote the subtitle, *The Greatest Science Fiction Novellas of All Time.* They were selected by the membership of the Science Fiction Writers of America, whose ballots were counted and winnowed by Ben Bova. He found himself at last with an irreducible list of 23 stories totalling over 400,000 words—far too many to include in one volume. Doubleday generously (and, I think, wisely) agreed to make two books rather than at-

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tempt to trim the list. And what a list! With somewhat agonizing restraint—the merest echo of what Bova and his Vol. 1 predecessor, Robert Silverberg, had to go through—I shall refrain from commenting at all on these stories, but will merely list them with the observations that long-term sf addicts must have this book, neophytes should have it, non-sf readers could hardly find a better introduction to the field and that no library worthy of the name should be without it.

VOLUME TWO A

Call Me Joe, Poul Anderson. *Who Goes There?* John Campbell. *Nerves*, Lester del Rey. *Universe*, Robert A.. Heinlein. *The Marching Morons*, C. M. Kornbluth. *Vintage Season*, Henry Kuttner and C. L. Moore (as Lawrence O'Donnell). *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, Walter M. Miller, Jr. . . . *And Then There Were None*, Eric Frank Russell. *The Ballad of Lost C'mell*, Cordwainer Smith. *The Time Machine*, H. G. Wells. *With Folded Hands*, Jack Williamson. *Baby is Three*, Theodore Sturgeon.

VOLUME TWO B

The Martian Way, Isaac Asimov. *Earthman, Come Home*, James Blish. *The Fireman*, Ray Bradbury. *The Spectre General*, Theodore Cogswell. *The Machine Stops*, E. M. Forster. *The Midas Plague*, Frederik Pohl. *The Witches of Karres*, James H. Schmitz. *E for Effort*, T. L. Sherred. *The Big Front Yard*, Clifford D. Simak. *The Moon Moth*, Jack Vance.

The earliest of these stories is the Wells; the latest, Cordwainer Smith's—1895 and 1962 respectively. The cost, at today's prices, is approximately two packs of cigarettes per story. Quit smoking and buy the books.

ANOTHER big one—530 pages and 15 fine stories, is The *Astounding-Analog Reader*, edited by Harry Harrison and Brian Aldiss—and it's called Volume One. Just how soon we may expect the rest, editors and publishers say not. Soon, I hope. The Hall of Fame books are largely a tribute to that extraordinary editor John W. Campbell, Jr.; the *Reader* is entirely so, as its introduction warmly states. Only one story from the *Hall of Fame* is duplicated here—Cordwainer Smith's classic. Inevitably, some of the authors are, but with different stories and I heartily applaud the choices:

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John Campbell himself, Asimov, Heinlein, Kuttner/Moore and Simak. In addition we have yarns by Gallun, Bates, P. Schuyler Miller, Ross Rocklyne, Bester, Leinster, Chandler, and Fredric Brown. The stories, most of them long ones, are arranged chronologically in five sections and range from 1932 to 1946, each section with its informative preface and yielding a most engrossing account of the growth and evolution of the magazine from its beginnings through the war years. A good choice for a basic library—and I shall keep you informed about the advent of the next volume.

JOHN BRUNNER, a most competent writer indeed, never ceases to amaze. Now he has translated from the French Gerard Klein's novel *Les Seigneurs de la Guerre. The Overlords of War* is many things—rather too many for me. It is space travel and time travel and swashbuckle, paradox and paradiddle and bakers' bevies of naked girls who may or may not be for real. The protagonist Corson is sometimes aware of the forces which push him around and sometimes not, and then again, in some other time-track, his truelove never existed at all except in his memory. I have seldom seen so much skin with so little sex. Brunner/Klein writes smoothly enough, Lord knows, but one is forcefully reminded of Fletcher Pratt's dictum on novelizing: "Your reader will willingly believe one unbelievable thing. Don't give him two!" A book like this illuminates the distinction between "amuse" and "bemuse." I am in awe of Brunner's ability with languages, but I would advise anyone with such talent never to translate a lesser writer than himself.

WITH *The Phaeton Condition* Douglas R. Mason climbs another step on the names-to-be-looked-for pyramid. He writes hard and glossy and fast and tight. Funny, too—English-slangy with that special vividness which pops up now and then from old Albion. Ecology is beginning to feel a little faddish by now (though I saw a bumper sticker not long ago: ECOLOGY: MAN'S LAST FAD) and without knocking the subject I'm beginning to look for fresh variants. Scientifically there's a critical booboo near the end—unless you can give me the address of a huge well of oxygen, stashed in the earth like natural gas—and, too, I find the win-every-round superboy a little unbelievable. And that ends the cavils. I had a good swift funny time reading this book and I want you to read it, too.

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SPEAKING of ecology and related subjects (like: have we gone so far over the edge we just can't get back?) Thomas Disch has given us a new selection of originals—stories, novelettes and poems—that at first blush would seem to be a downer. *Bad Moon Rising* has as its theme (to quote the blurb) "a concern for the present political scene and the dismal, or dismaying or downright terrifying direction in which it's been drifting and/or hurtling during this last grim decade." Yet a downer it is not—and all credit for this goes to Disch and his precise, compassionate sense of balance and taste. He is a good writer who knows good writing. One wonders how much of this volume he gigged, pressured, tickled and forced his writers to produce for him. Surely no anthologist could be so lucky as to find writers and writing like this under a cabbage leaf. Further, the contents spread and spill over the fences of conventional sf, a movement I always applaud. Such a spreading does not always succeed as sf, art or literature—indeed, it may well fail more often than it succeeds—and that is, in evolutionary terms, a commonplace and more "natural"—more scientific, if you like—than drawing lines and driving pilings to inhibit growth and change. I have a personal fondness for living literature, which means the acceptance of growth and change. Disch's approach is confluent with this and I refuse not to applaud, for example, Marilyn Hacker's cry of pain at the death of Janis Joplin just because it leans over the fence. I know where its roots are and I'm proud of the soil. *Bad Moon Rising* will be one of those permanent possessions, to go with me wherever I go, to live on a shelf within reach. There are shockers in here that swirl and shake: Ellison, Silverberg, Disch himself; and poignancy as in two fragments by Effinger which reverently extend the narratives of a pair of your most treasured childrens' stories. Gene Wolfe, Carol Emshwiller, Norman Rush, Kit Reed grab your shoulders, swing you around and say *Look! Look! Look at what's happening!* Maybe you don't want to look. If so, you are not really involved in speculative fiction, which of course is not my problem nor Disch's, but yours. Anyway, get this good big living book.

I must say a good happy grateful word for *The Best from Galaxy*, and say it for more reasons than loyalty to Our Favorite Magazine. It calls itself Volume One, and I hope it leads to a long series. These stories are chosen from the rich crop of 1969-71, and include

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Ellison, Niven, Blish, Lafferty, that new bright light Bill Earls, that totally reliable old hand A. Bertram Chandler, and a thick clutch of others. A nice basketful.

Let me share a joy with you: watching Robert Heinlein on the Apollo Cruise, neat and sharp in a white dinner jacket, at 2 A.M. tipping the orchestra leader to give him a tango, and dancing it beautifully on the slowly slanting deck with his lovely wife.

I must report to you, with regret, that a page of my copy was squeezed out of the last issue and the listing of titles, publishers and prices was omitted. I hasten to make good, so here, as compactly as possible, are the books reviewed in the last issue:

Clareson's *A Spectrum of Worlds*, Doubleday, $5.95. Robbins' *Another Roadside Attraction*, Ballantine $1.50. Biggle's *The Metallic Muse*, Doubleday $5.95. Gerrold's *When Harlie Was One*, Doubleday Book Club $1.49. *Reference Guide to Fantastic Films*, Chelsea-Lee. And From DAW, each 95¢: Biggle's *The World Menders*, Phillifent's *Genius Unlimited*, Davis' *The Year's Best Horror Stories*, Koontz' *A Darkness in my Soul*, Elgin's *At the Seventh Level*, Dick's *We Can Build You*, and Dutton's *The Mindblocked Man*. ★

DIRECTIONS (Cont. from page 4)

Make Room! *and* Dune *are not going to go down in history as any great literary wonders. Why?* Not *because they're relevant (though they attempt to be), but because they're shoddy novels. And yet think of how many great books there are that* were *considered relevant in their time! Dickens'* Hard Times, *the social satires of Jane Austen,* Gulliver's Travels, *and so on, are all as well read (in fact,* more so) as they were when written. *Why? Because all these books touch universal chords in the reader. Heinlein does not.*

Mr. Higginbotham's letter is so true it's frightening. If we as science fiction writers and readers strive in our literature for action without purpose, excitement without meaning, relevance without humanity, then sf not only deserves the beratings it so often gets.

This is not, of course, what Mr. Higginbotham means. But it is what he says. *What he means is that science fiction should be all pure adventure, without any trivialities such as "meaning" or "theme" or "symbolism" to tie it down. That's like saying a jet should be all engines and no seats.*

But sf shouldn't confine itself to being simply a literature of adventure. It is exactly that heritage that bogs it down, that keeps it from gaining the stature it deserves. Leave the straightforward punchfests for those who never got over their father-fixations. The time is coming for science fiction to turn to the truths that matter to the rest of mankind. One only hopes they won't demand too many action sequences.

Dave Wise
Sherman Oaks, California

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